New Testament
Toaru Majutsu no Index 4

[Starting November 13th, we, the 27 companies of the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians, will be holding a tournament called "Natural Selector" in Eastern Europe's Baggage City.]

It began with that announcement.

Using World War III as an opportunity, Anti-Academy City forces searched for various ways to resist around the world. Natural Selector is a different type of tournament with the objective of proving the existence of a supernatural power that will outdo esper powers. This will destroy the core of Academy City's identity. That strategy goes ahead with the help of Gremlin, an organization that is a fusion of magic and science.

And...

Academy City will not allow it.

A mere three Kiharas and a mere three members of Gremlin. The horrible mayhem does not end there.

新約 とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス） 4

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Kamachi Kazuma

The area under an overpass is a very strange space. Is it just me, or do ramen shops in that area look at lot more delicious than normal?

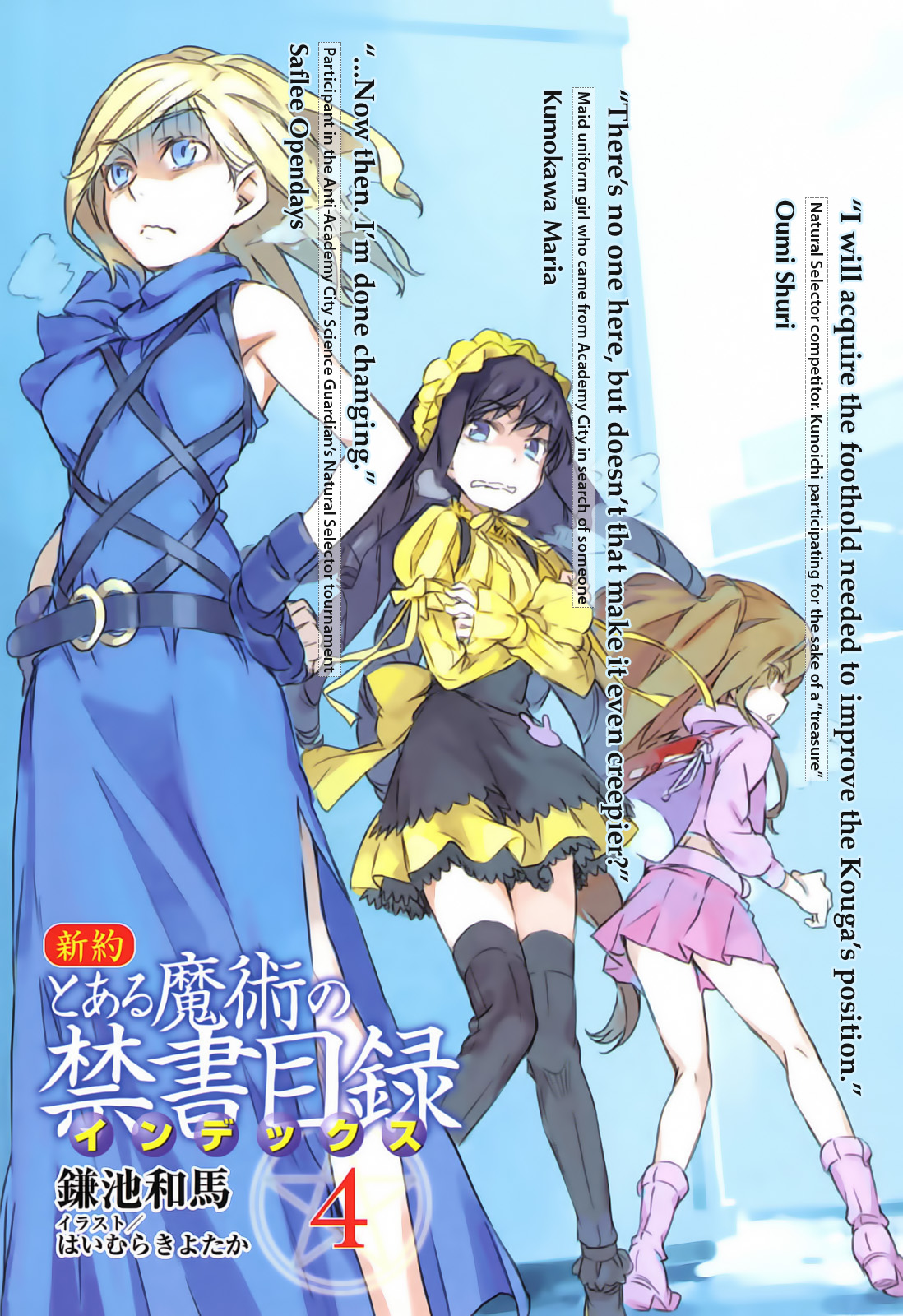
[Products of Dengeki Bunko]

Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~22
Toaru Majutsu no Index SS 1 & 2
New Testament Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~4
Heavy Object
Heavy Object: Adoption War
Heavy Object: Shadow of the Giants
Heavy Object: Treasure of Electronic Mathematics
Heavy Object: Festival of Death

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

I'm originally from Onomichi City of Hiroshima Prefecture. Now I live in a certain area of Kantou living a half hikikomori life while drawing illustrations.

カバー／暁印刷



"I will acquire the foothold needed to improve the Kouga's position."

Natural Selector competitor. Kunoichi participating for the sake of a "treasure"

Oumi Shuri

"There's no one here, but doesn't that make it even creepier?"

Maid uniform girl who came from Academy City in search of someone

Kumokawa Maria

"...Now then. I'm done changing."

Participant in the Anti-Academy City Science Guardian's Natural Selector tournament

Saflee Opendays

新約

とある魔術の禁書目録

インデックス

鎌池和馬

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はいむらきよたか

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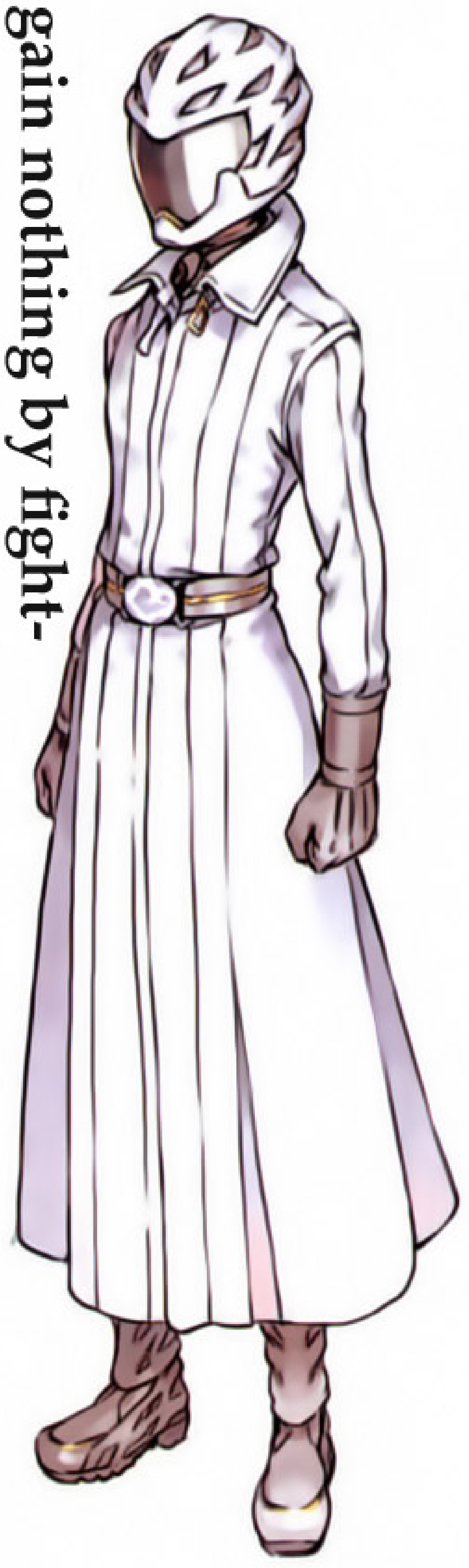

"To be honest, I gain nothing by fighting you two. I specialize in Kiharas."

Mysterious figure watching over the conflict between Kiharas and Gremlin

Helmeted Man

Designed by Hirokazu Watanabe(2725 Inc.)

"We could have done this more simply. We should have just gone the simple route."

Magician and official member of Gremlin, the organization that is a fusion of science and magic

Sigyn

"Is that all the great Academy City can do? I thought you guys were the winners of World War III?"

Dvergr and official member of Gremlin, the organization that is a fusion of science and magic

Marian Slingeneyer

"As long as it damages Academy City, anything is fine."

Magician and official member of Gremlin, the organization that is a fusion of science and magic

Útgarða-Loki

"If you've figured it out, I guess there's no point in holding back!!"

Kihara family member in charge of "giving up"

Kihara Byouri

"Who are you?"

Girl who is said to not qualify as a Kihara

Kihara Enshuu

"Okay, let's get started!! The rules have been switched up a bit, but we'll be playing a game of Russian roulette!!"

Kihara family member in charge of "experiences"

Kihara Ransuu

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KAMACHI KAZUMA

鎌池和馬

イラスト・はいむらきよたか

HAIMURA KIYOTAKA

デザイン・渡邊宏一（2725 Inc.）

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The Opening

Combat Games

“NATURAL SELECTOR”

Sponsored by “SCIENCE GUARDIAN”

MAIN.01

Starting November 13th, we, the 27 companies of the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians, will be holding a tournament called “Natural Selector” in Eastern Europe’s Baggage City.

The rules are as follows.

A victor will be determined in a 1-on-1 tournament style.

The stage shall be a circle with a diameter of 30 meters. When the match begins, all entrances will be sealed. As such, escape is impossible. Destroying the walls with an attack shall not be penalized, but leaving through such a hole will lead to disqualification.

An immediate loss will be determined either by completely losing one’s consciousness or giving a sign of surrender. If the opponent is killed in the process of knocking them unconscious, the victor will not be penalized.

The time for each match will be 15 minutes. Once that limit has been reached, a tournament doctor will determine the victor by measuring the physical damage to each contestant.

Contestants may bring in equipment including clothes so long as it does not exceed 80 kilograms. However, the contestant must be able to wear or hold the equipment in both hands at the time the match begins. No platform or tripod may be used to hold the equipment in place.

No gunpowder, explosives, poisons, bacteria, radioactive materials, etc. as established by the Second Frankfurt War Treaty may be used. Any materials not covered by the treaty are not restricted.

Anyone who does not meet the above requirements will not be allowed to participate. Also, if non-compliance is discovered partway through, the participant’s progress will be revoked and the participant will be made to leave.

If a non-compliant participant refuses to follow our orders to leave, they will be forcibly removed by our unmanned weapons.

This tournament, named after the process of natural selection, has only one prize. The victor will verify a global standard for the replacement of Academy City's espers.

With things such as UFOs and OOPArts, many people have faced bitter experiences because people assume anything not from Academy City is not scientific and must be fake. We plan to show just how unreasonable that treatment is.

We urge you to use this chance to prove that it is real.

SUB.02

“This is just a collection of horrible monsters,” spat out Shar Berylan.

He was a large white man in his mid-twenties. However, he was not actually a participant in Natural Selector. He would hate to be mistaken for one. He was a security guard sent to Baggage City by the 27 cooperative institutions that had broken away from Academy City and were now known as the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians.

For this part-time job, he wore a bulletproof jacket and was armed with a carbine and grenades.

“Did you hear? There’s some UFO nut, some deep sea idiot who’s in love with Atlantis, and some loner who claims to talk with a mass of bacteria collected from Mars. Why are they trying to get advice from people that trample other’s fields and shout up in to the night sky? It wouldn’t surprise me if these people ended up committing mass suicide.”

Other security guards like him had been gathered there. He was in an indoor space at gate 17 on the outside of the dome-shaped tournament facility. The guards were supposed to remain outside the dome, but it was a white hell at -20 degrees out there. With all the unmanned weapons deployed, no flesh-and-blood human would want to be out there. Shar assumed the higher ups who had given the order had warmed their heads too much with the heaters and forgotten that human bodily fluids froze at 0 degrees.

One of his fellow guards looked around hesitantly as he too neglected to perform his patrolling duties.

“Academy City espers are freaks, too. It’s just a choice between the freaks you know and the freaks you don’t.”

“They’re all a bunch of damn skunks. I don’t want to fight with them or even have anything to do with them. I don’t want to be their enemy or their ally. If you poke at them the wrong way, they’ll spray that stink all over you. Even if you win, you aren’t gonna be happy in the end.”

He then heard the sound of something rolling. It was coming from the small wheels of a suitcase. A girl with an excellent body approached in the passageway that was dim due to having too few fluorescent lights for its size.

“Which way to the waiting room?”

“Keep following this passageway, and you should find another guard, Miss Opendays.”

“Understood. I will ask him.”

Just as the girl passed him, she muttered in his ear.

“In this tunnel-like passageway, your voice carries a good ways. Be careful.”

Shar Berylan felt sweat appear on his back.

He timidly turned around just in time to see the girl called Opendays disappearing down the dim passageway.

“Damn skunk.”

“She probably heard that too. Also, I’m surprised you learned the names of the contestants.”

“She’s one of more normal ones,” spat out Shar. “C’mon, let’s go elsewhere. All the freaks are gonna pass through here. At this rate, we’re gonna have to deal with someone wearing only pajamas and obsessed with oneiromancy or someone wearing tons of bandages and obsessed with blood type fortune telling.”

“Let’s try to find a coffee vending machine. And is the heater even working here?”

Just as they started moving, they heard a slight squishing noise come from the dim passageway.

Only after the noise continued at an irregular pace, did they realize the noise was a footstep. It had simply not seemed like a noise a fellow human being could make.

But something else was strange.

While the noise itself continued repeatedly, it did not come from just one place. It had originally sounded as if it had come from down the passageway, but it could be heard coming from the walls, the ceiling, and finally even right next to their ears and pressing up against their backs. Shar turned around again and again, but he could see no one there.

Finally, a figure appeared down the passageway.

He could not tell if the figure was male or female. The figure was completely covered in worn-out cloth to the top of his or her head, so not even the shape of the face or the overall silhouette could be seen. Shar was not even sure if the figure had two eyes and a mouth.

“……”

A strange noise came from where one would assume a face would be.

Shar could tell it was something like a voice, but he could not tell what was being said. As the figure's footsteps resounded from the walls and roof, it slowly passed by Shar.

Shar was quite proud of himself for not immediately holding up his carbine.

Finally, the figure disappeared down the other side of the passageway. He disappeared in the same direction the girl called Opendays had gone. He(?) was one of the participants in the Natural Selector tournament. He was one of the freaks gathered to oppose Academy City.

His fellow guard started breathing heavily as if he had suddenly remembered he had to breathe and asked Shar a question with his eyes open wide.

"…What the hell was that?"

"One of the favorites for victory," spat out Shar in response. "Goes by the name Grecky Reletsman and supposedly uses magic. So what, is this person going to pull a dove out of a silk hat?"

◆

The Natural Selector tournament began without delay.

Many types of "freaks" were gathered.

It was possible something not even Academy City could control was mixed in among them.

SUB.03

Saflee Opendays was one of the participants in the Natural Selector tournament. She was around 20 years old. Her shoulder-length blonde hair and white skin were her defining physical characteristic and her body was not bad either. She looked good enough to get a job as a magazine model, but she personally preferred the world of fist fighting.

In the locker-filled participant waiting room, Saflee checked over her outfit. Belying her expectations when she had heard of the dome-shaped tournament facility, the waiting room was rather simple. The snowy Eastern European weather did not help, and the supposedly heated waiting room left a chill spreading into her feet. Was the entire facility the same?

However, her outfit was also part of the problem.

What she wore resembled a deep blue party dress, but the material it was made of and the strength of the joints had been greatly altered. Above the dress, leather belts were wrapped around mostly her upper body.

Those belts were not strategically placed to give her some kind of advantage.

First, a tournament was a type of show business, so she wanted to stand out in some way.

Second, she wanted to give any enemy that specialized in throws an obvious target to grab for.

Natural Selector allowed equipment up to a total weight of 80 kilograms, but the only equipment other than her clothes Saflee had weighed a mere 500 grams.

Namely, she wore fingerless gloves with urethane inside in order to reduce the stress to her fists.

"…Now then. I'm done changing," she muttered.

Speaking to oneself was a stereotypical way of mental changes appearing externally, but it could also be used as a simple means of autosuggestion. Needless to say, regulating one's mental state was immensely useful in sports and combat.

However…

“You, spiky-haired Asian boy. Could you explain to me why you charged in here while I was in the middle of changing?”

This time, she was not going through a solo process of intentionally regulating her mental state. She actually had someone to speak to.

The spiky-haired boy was not in some cute situation where his cheek had a bit of crimson in it from an open-handed slap. Instead, he had been skillfully pummeled by elbows and knees that had been intended to be used in the actual tournament. The boy was limply lying on a bench and his face was horribly swollen as if he had stuck his face into a giant bee hive.

“…I’m Kamijou Thouma. Nithe to meeth you.”

“I am Saflee Opendays. My hobby is all kinds of physical fighting. If I broke any of your teeth, I apologize. I cannot do anything beyond apologizing though.”

“I theem to be fine.”

“You seem to be trying to play this off as nothing, but I’m actually quite worried. You seemed to be fairly fit, but you’re an amateur, aren’t you? Do I need to call a doctor?”

“Can we just continue our conversation?”

“I heard what you said while I was changing.” Saflee leaned up against the locker and sighed with her arms folded. “You said someone intentionally had Natural Selector – or rather, the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians sponsoring it – created. And you want to destroy this person’s aspirations and bring the Academy City cooperative institutions back to their original position.”

“It was Leivinia Birdway,” replied Kamijou Touma while mumbling a bit. “She used the incident in Hawaii to give the cooperative institutions a sense of danger leading to their splitting off and becoming an independent group. How this is related to the magic cabal called Gremlin—think of them as something like a terrorist group—is still unknown, but Gremlin has to be planning to do something related to the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians.”

“And this has all shown itself in the form of Natural Selector?”

“Exactly.” Kamijou sighed. “I have no idea what they’re after, but Natural Selector has to have a purpose beyond the official one. And I doubt that reason will be a good thing for the participants like you.”

"So they're going to throw us into giant refrigerators as specimens for some kind of human experiment?"

"…I suppose it's possible."

Saflee was at a loss for words when the boy seriously responded to her joke.

Kamijou Touma continued in a low voice.

"I don't know what Gremlin is after either, but given Radiosonde Castle and the invasion of Hawaii, their objective is sure to make a lot of people suffer when it comes to the surface. Knowing that, I cannot overlook this. It's also partly my fault that things have gotten so serious."

He did not speak in some overly grand way as if in an attempt to convince her. This actually made his words seem oddly real.

However, she had her own reason to participate in the tournament.

"Why did you contact me?"

"No reason. To be honest, I got lost and came in here by accident. I don't know the layout of Baggage City. I would appreciate it if you would help me, but I think that would be very dangerous, so I don't recommend it."

"So I can't participate in the tournament or take any action to destroy it? What do you want me to do then?"

"If possible I want you to escape as soon as you can."

"That I most certainly cannot do."

"You can't?"

"I'll think about it if you defeat me in a quick three minute match."

Having previously had his face pummeled by her "Kyaahh! Pervert!!" reaction, Kamijou quickly raised his hands above his head.

Saflee gave a small smile.

"I am neither for nor against your plan. As long as I can achieve my objective, I do not care. Once I do so, Natural Selector can be cancelled and the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians can be demolished for all I care."

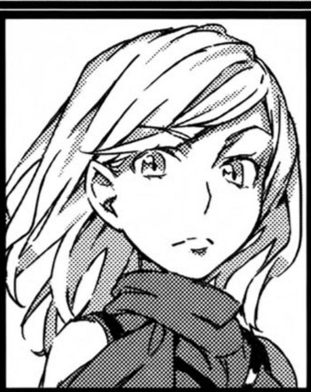
“Your objective?”

A high-pitched alarm sounded within the waiting room.

It was the signal for the participant to enter the arena. It was the invitation to a life-or-death battle. Upon hearing it, Saflee Opendays calmly removed her back from the locker.

In a relaxed voice, she responded to Kamijou’s question.

“What you children of Academy City have so casually obtained is what the rest of us humans cannot obtain no matter what we do.”



Natural Selector competitor

Saflee Opendays

CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

SUB.04

Baggage City had previously been a regional city in Eastern Europe. For being in Europe, it had remained relatively untouched by history. The city was lined with rectangular concrete buildings, but this was primarily due to the city having been developed to combat the cold. The city had been forcibly taken over by the military during World War III because it was expected to function well as a central point along the railroad network along which materiel was to be transported. However, before the urban buildings could be destroyed and the military facilities could be constructed, the war had quickly ended, leaving the base in a state of half-completion.

Normally, the city would have been returned to its original residents at that point, but that was not the case. It was said to be due to military interests, but a lot was unknown about the process by which the military ended up selling Baggage City to the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians.

The four dome-shaped arenas were the main symbol of the city and a cross-shaped arrangement of high-rise buildings was built between them. The materiel and barriers brought into the city during the war gave a strange accent to the cityscape and a number of unmanned weapons that had not been returned to Academy City were set up in various places.

The lack of complaints from the original owners of the very valuable city plus the strict guard held by the weapons gave Baggage City a very dangerous aura.

Or perhaps it was their plan to compete with the incomprehensible technology of Academy City.

(It doesn’t really matter.)

Saflee Opendays thought as she walked down the tunnel-like passageway that led to the ring.

(As long as I can accomplish my objective, it doesn’t matter whose help I get.)

Saflee took a step out into the immense light filling the exit of the tunnel.

A great explosive noise rang in her ears. The noise was a combination of the loud music prepared for the tournament, the cheers of the spectators in the seats filling the area outside the fence surrounding the circular ring, and the shouting voice of the announcer coming from the giant speakers. The multiple loud noises created a giant spiral of noise that filled the giant arena. It had a way of forcing people into a more excited state which was not a good thing for the contestants who wished to remain calm. It was possible the ones making the noise wished to get the contestants worked up to the point that it became a violent fight between berserkers.

The entire area was large enough to play baseball or football in, and the ring for Saflee and the others was like a giant birdcage in the center.

The circular ring had a diameter of 30 meters.

Compared to normal martial arts rings, that was rather large, but compared to the size of the entire arena, it did seem like nothing more than a birdcage. The dome's ceiling had several huge screens hanging down which were displaying information on the matches. This was mostly due to the distance between the spectator seats and the ring, but it did bring doubts as to what was gained by seeing it in person.

The instant Saflee exited the tunnel into the ring that was completely cut off from everything else by a chain-link fence, cheers and light washed over her and a thick fence dropped down like a guillotine behind her, cutting off the way back.

(The floor is reinforced concrete? Are they insane? A single throw could take out all of someone's organs. This is more dangerous than some idiot with a knife or a gun.)

In contrast to her elegant-looking dress, Saflee wore only flat-soled sneakers on her feet, and she frowned as he checked the feel of the floor through them.

As she did, the shouts of the announcer who was keeping a safe distance reverberated throughout the arena as they were amplified by the giant speakers.

"This is the 35th match of the first round, but over 20 matches still remain! This is a tournament, so the first round is at the bottom of the pyramid and is the longest! Let's get this over with and get on to the next match!!"

(What a horrible performance.)

Saflee frowned.

"Over here, we have Saflee Opendays!! While all the others are strange people who insist their ninjas or UFOs or parasites will not lose to Academy City, this blonde fighter is taking on the Natural Selector with nothing but pure martial arts!! Should we call her reckless or should we praise her skill for making it this far unarmed? The time has come for her to prove her true worth!!"

The already bright stage lights focused on Saflee, causing her to squint and put one hand up to her forehead. However, it did not last long. As soon as her opponent stepped into the ring, the lights moved to him.

“And over here, we have Osad Flakehelm!! He is the standard type of strange person to enter the Natural Selector! He claims to have independently discovered the secrets of the implant technology used by aliens and implanted it into his own brain. Will this match allow this man to prove the practicality of his electromagnetic attacks coming from his many antennae!?”

He was a large topless man almost 2 meters tall, but his weapon was very odd for a street fight or a tournament ring. The silver umbrella-like object in his right hand was likely a parabolic antenna and the object in his left hand was clearly a TV antenna. The backpack-like parts on his back had a number of arms sticking out each of which had something like a fishing reel attached. They had metal wires in them, so they were likely antennae as well.

With both contestants out, the cheers grew explosively to the point of no individual voice being distinguishable from the rest. However, Saflee could hear the truth of the matter mixed in with the cheers. They were not merely cheers of excitement. A bit of mockery was mixed in.

(I do understand.)

Saflee silently thought as she opened and closed the 10 fingers that extended from her fingerless gloves.

(Everyone views things as doubtful as long as they are not from Academy City. Even if you are recognized as legitimate, that only comes after Academy City has something to say about it. You are always kicked to the sidelines and looked down on by average people who are not specialists but still act like they know what they are talking about. I do understand the desire for a chance to turn things around all at once in this world.)

It was unclear what it meant, but Osad pointed his many antennae toward her.

(That is the point of Natural Selector. If these bizarre people are sent after each other until one reaches the top, they can show the world that something other than Academy City has appeared in this world. We have no intention of sitting idly by while we are driven off to the edges of the world. We intend to take this new global standard for ourselves.)

“An announcement,” said the invisible attack specialist while barely moving his lips. “Five seconds after the match begins, microwaves will accurately target the lymph fluid in your semicircular canals. It will be at a level you can resist, but do not raise your head. That will likely make you vomit. I will try to make you faint as quickly as possible, but there is a danger of your windpipe becoming blocked up.”

“Accurate and quick, hm?” With a small smile, Saflee lightly punched her open hand with her other hand.

"I don't like saying anything about the style others use, but isn't that pretty boring? And as grand as the term electromagnetic attack sounds, its effects are relatively subdued and you can't see them. Having something that is easier to understand can act as a weapon in and of itself. The lack of that may be why everyone has been treating you as a fake."

"I do not enjoy unnecessary destruction. Praising those who minimize the destruction required to achieve their goals is done worldwide."

"What world are you from? At the very least, the small world I am from where people decide things with their fists does no such thing. Also, not all destruction is bad. If you treat everything as precious, you're just going to end up owning a house of trash."

"Are you saying you enjoy destruction?"

Osad's expression made it clear he found that hard to understand, and Saflee nodded in response.

"I do. Once you start to enjoy it, you start to pursue the exhilaration it gives you. And then you start to desire purer and purer destruction. Someone like you speaking your hatred of destruction is like someone acting like they know what an authentic pizza restaurant is like after eating a frozen pizza from the supermarket. To be honest, it pisses me off a bit even if you meant nothing by it."

"What are you talking about?"

"The level of destruction changes depending on what you destroy and how you destroy it. For example, no one likes hearing some kid crying. Even if you're trying to destroy some giant robot or crushing the entire mafia, the value is brought down if some kid is left crying in the process. That is why those pursuing the exhilaration of destruction will act to avoid things like that. The purest destruction does not scare people; it moves them." Saflee paused for a second. "And so I have looked into the fact that *you have threatened one of the doctors in charge of measuring our damage*."

Osad's eyebrows twitched.

"*I also know that your 3 year old daughter was captured by…self-proclaimed MIBs was it? Anyway, by people who value profit over all else*."

Osad's body started to visibly tremble.

"*I hate this kind of crap, so how about I take care of all of them for you?*"

Saflee Opendays pointed back over her shoulder with her thumb. Osad froze when he spotted familiar faces mixed in with the great crowd.

"…Why?"

"*This is what destruction truly is*. Didn't I tell you? It's the pursuit of that exhilaration. Destruction taken for that reason is not some simple evil. True destruction is something those who love verbal violence will never reach because they mix all kinds of violence together in just the one word. Although I did just fail in that regard after having someone peek on me changing," said Saflee as she punched her open palm again. "Now that I've given you a nice little tutorial, how about we actually enjoy this? The exhilaration that comes from ridiculous levels of destruction can't be beat."

In the place of a gong, a loud electronic buzzer rang.

The two intelligent beasts were removed from their restraints so they could clash.

SUB.05

There were a lot of areas where access was forbidden in Baggage City, and this was one of such places. The room seemed to balance the development costs to all the areas that could be accessed. The top floor of the high-rise hotel was a throne, but that was an obvious disguise. Most of the masterminds would be gathered in the underground facility far away from there.

Weissland Strainikov deliberately used this dummy facility that could be easily attacked, or maybe it was just a stance.

He had no right to say any kind words, but either way, he couldn't allow for ordinary citizens to be sacrificed under unnecessary conditions. Because of this, Weissland took the risk of being in a place that could get him involved if citizens were sacrificed. This was a somewhat ironic place for Weissland, but it wasn't what he was focusing on.

What he wanted to avoid was simply unnecessary bloodshed.

Thus, if there was a need, the old man called Weissland would not hesitate. Furthermore, he believed that spreading this concept to people everywhere as a form of redemption.

The caretaker of Baggage City.

The 27 companies of the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians were gathered into 3 groups, and he was one of the leaders of these groups.

He was in charge of its food source, whether it was purely about finances, biofuels or microbiology. This was the 'large old man' who used to support Academy City, but had now became a pillar of the resistance against Academy City.

"...I'm often mistook for being a person of catastrophic ideals, but I'm just someone who hopes to avoid tragedies," said Weissland, as he sat on the soft chair in front of a large ebony table.

The outside was a landscape infamous as a blizzard zone. The snowy white scene extended beyond the horizon, but there was a soothing heated air that warmed the room isolated by thick glass.

“But everyone in the world wishes for happiness, yet turn on each other, creating clear losers in the end. It’s like the currently proceeding Natural Selector. As for what we should do in this situation, I suppose it’s necessary to think that a tragedy may occur.”

“There’s nothing that could be taken for added proof if we consider avoiding tragedy as our priority. Are you able to use something like a black box to bet on this?”

A blond, frivolous looking man was sitting on the ebony table. He was wearing a suit, and had a complete 180-degree different impression than the old man.

Or rather, the blond man’s happy-go-lucky attitude with regards to everything in the world showed his principles.

Útgarða-Loki.

One of the official members of the magic society Gremlin that had been sent over.

“The Anti-Academy City Science Guardians has tremendous power, whether it’s purely on a technological level or the unmanned weapons that were borrowed from there. But can those guys use these things properly? Turning the technology existing in your minds into weapons, developing them, mass producing them, live testing them and letting the soldiers read the operation manuals—these will all take time. Even if it’s unmanned weapons, I doubt you can use them to their utmost capacity without Academy City’s support. Even if you can power these weapons, standing in one spot or toddling is the extent of your ability, right? The same is true of the Natural Selector this time,” Útgarða-Loki added without any sense of tension.

That’s right. To discover a ‘certain existence’ that could go against Academy City’s espers, analyze them accurately, and create a large-scale system…these would take time.

Weissland seemed to agree with that,

“Of course, Academy City won’t allow us time. There could be a swift attack if they decided to do so.”

“Academy City had entrusted *them* to their cooperative organizations.”

Not unmanned weapons.

In a certain sense, it was an existence that was even more valuable.

Cheap and highly efficient.

A ‘weapon’ that obviously went against international laws.

"The military clones of the #3 esper, is it? If we had succeeded in the capture of one of them, the situation would have probably differed."

"But the 10,000 individual units disappeared as if have grasped perfect timing. Small fires broke out from the places where they lived…and it seemed that they prepared some camouflaged DNA map processes with multiple records from the data archives that had been destroyed through electronic means."

"…Most likely, someone used the girls' network to relay tactics. There's no concrete evidence and the data's gone. We can't research on our own, and if we try to reveal the crime of creating these clones, it would end up being discarded as just some 'stereotypical urban legend'."

"Even so, Academy City won't relax so simply."

"…That's why we're contacting you guys to repair this. We're the same as you, Gremlin, in the sense of breaking the unipolar centralized system of Academy City."

"We just don't intend to be shields in a human wave tactic."

"I hadn't placed my hopes on that anyway. Or rather, we're grateful that you didn't do anything about it. If you don't act anything, the enemy will suspect us."

Weisland arranged the reports on the table in a fan shape like he was laying playing cards, and said,

"And the more careful they are, the more time they will try to grasp information before attacking. It's what we call buying time. If we can gain some time, we can make sure that we're ready for battle. For this reason, whether Gremlin or the Natural Selector, if we can transport a large number of containers through air or transport intelligence over, it would be part of the job."

"Are you able to reach a level where you can fight them?"

"Academy City has unimaginable technology and the ability to rationalize skills. They lack resources, though. We, the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians, must spread the news that we have a chance of winning and get the world thoroughly involved…and letting them run out of resources and food is the best way to prevent war from continuing."

"Unsubstantial and fictional information operations?" Útgarða-Loki smiled happily. "What I liked was developing. That's why I came here."

"I'm doing that, but it isn't what I'm looking forward to. I hate formless number battles. If we increase the prices of food, the people left in reality will starve."

"That pile of papers there is part of it, right? If it's memory installation that the science side specializes in, wouldn't a stamp-sized flash memory be enough?"

"That's just a countermeasure for security's sake. However, it'd be meaningless in the end if people other than I don't agree with it."

Weissland's notebook was placed on the table, but it seemed that only the necessary information and the registration numbers were there.

It was obviously inefficient, but it may have been his 'detailed plan' to save hungry people somewhere by wasting paper resources.

Even though it was as useless as a storm blowing up a treasure bowl.

But the image that appeared in Útgarða-Loki's mind made him smile frivolously.

"I'm also involved with people's lives and death, but I'm not obsessed with life and death more than you. No matter what, if we decide to use corn to operate vehicles, several countries will end up starving. But on the other hand, if we give it up, other countries will starve because of financial difficulties."

"…"

"Yoo. Even when facing such a complicated demise, can you truly have the sense of accomplishment of saving others? To be honest, I don't understand such a world."

"It's not some long-lived experience you can understand from asking me. It's not something worth learning either."

The reality was that mothers were unable to feed their deathly-thin children as their breast milk dried up and the wastage of carbohydrates continued while they were praising the earth and activating machines. To the two old men who had an acute knowledge of them, there was a deep darkness that even Gremlin couldn't step in.

And then, even in the deep darkness, there were blatant bright spots.

"I'm just searching for a means to use the necessary materials fairly in order to survive. I asked Academy City for help before, and now, I have to ask others. If you knew how many people are dying every single minute on this planet, you would understand that we shouldn't be wasting our time."

"I am limited in what I can do, but if it's like this…"

"That's enough. I'm about the same level too."

"If we can harm Academy City, it doesn't matter what we do."

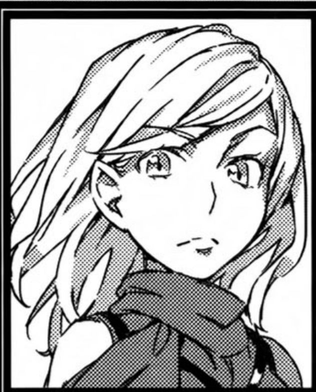
“…I just feel that you guys aren’t simply taking action based on a simple ideal. Well, are we making use of each other?”

Just as Weissland had muttered, his notebook displayed a new window. The old man frowned and said,

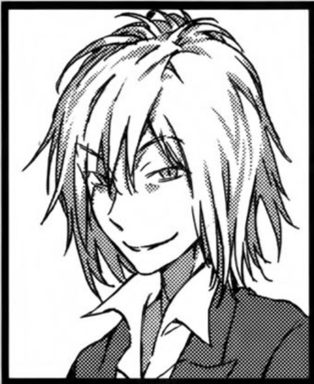
“It looks like the time for us to take action has arrived.”

“What are the specifics?”

“You’re to eliminate the intruders.”



Natural Selector competitor
Saflee Opendays



GREMLIN's official member
Útgarða-Loki

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SUB.06

Her body battered by the fierce attacks from Monsieur Microwave Oven, Saflee Opendays dragged herself back to the waiting room while leaning up against the wall. The spiky-haired boy must have left because she was the only one there.

Her first victory had been a tough one.

“That bastard wasn’t half bad,” she muttered under her breath as she took a sip from a bottle of mineral water.

The metallic taste made her grimace and she spat it back out into the provided sink. Even after being hit by the attack, she still had no idea how electromagnetic waves could injure her within her mouth.

(Is every match going to be that tough? It isn’t my style to fight while thinking about how much damage I’m accumulating.)

She did not have enough energy left to change back into her normal clothes. Still in her battle dress, she sat on the bench and breathed a heavy sigh. Natural Selector was a tournament style competition where the first round was completed on the first day, the second round on the second day, and so forth. As such, no competitor had to fight in more than one match per day. This meant Saflee had no further plans for the day now that she had finished her match, however she was unsure if she could recover from the damage she had taken in just that one day.

Suddenly, a screen she did not recognize appeared on the lock panel next to the door.

She was confused, but then she heard rushed footsteps and Baggage City security guards rushed in. For how much they hated Academy City, their methods were more or less the same. Their clothes were damp in places and snow covered their shoulders, so they were unlikely to be guards that patrolled the inside of the dome-shaped facility. They had likely walked in through the blizzard outside.

“Are you okay?”

“What is it? Is there a short circuit, meaning I’ll get a shock if I touch that panel?”

“It seems that there has been an intruder. Just to be sure, we are checking on the safety of the higher ups and the competitors.”

The faces of the spiky-haired boy and Monsieur Microwave Oven entered Saflee's mind.

"That's quite a task. Aren't there about 100 competitors alone?"

"There are more of us, so that is not an issue."

"And yet you did not do a thing in response to those self-proclaimed MIBs."

"This intruder is different. It is possible that this one is directly related to Academy City."

"…"

Saflee gave a heavy sigh upon hearing those stubborn words.

(It would just be a waste of time to lecture them about destruction.)

She then started to rethink things about that spiky-haired boy.

How had that amateur boy even gotten into Baggage City?

(It seems those self-proclaimed MIBs snuck in too, so did he happen to find the hole they entered through? It would have taken some doing to wait around until they opened that hole, but that boy didn't seem like the type to do that.)

Also…

Why had that boy snuck into Baggage City?

"Their objective is sure to make a lot of people suffer when it comes to the surface."

Saflee sighed once more and stood up from the bench.

"What are you going to do about this intruder?"

"Shoot them."

"And what am I to do?"

"Please wait here until this has been resolved. We will guard you."

"I repeat: And yet you did not do a thing in response to those self-proclaimed MIBs."

"We are not talking about keeping the matches fair. We are talking about making sure Academy City does not steal the technology that could become the key to the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians' future."

"…"

(This clearly isn't leading to any exhilaration.)

That was the martial arts obsessed girl's opinion.

Abandoning somebody just because she was not obligated to help them did not lead to the exhilaration she spoke of either. The sort of people who would worry themselves over something like that would also say that "all destruction is wrong" with a self-satisfied look on their faces, which made her feel that the world was extremely messed up.

Saflee Opendays looked back over toward the Baggage City guards. There were four of them. They all wore military uniforms and helmets and were armed with pump-action shotguns.

"It looks like doing as you say would be the wise choice."

"You don't have any reason not to, do you?"

"The problem comes from the fact that I do."

And so…

A chop to the neck.

A fist to the gut.

A throw that sent his back slamming to the ground.

Pressure to the carotid artery.

After quickly incapacitating the four of them, Saflee put her hands to her hips and sighed.

"It's strange how people call you kind when you say you held back. You're still employing violence nonetheless."

Even if they were unconscious, she could not bring herself to change in front of them, so Saflee exited the waiting room in her battle dress.

"Wah! God, it's cold!!"

She immediately went back in and swiped one of the guard's jackets.

Even if the heating was cheap, it was still there, so she had forgotten how impractical that show business dress was.

It did help a bit with the cold, but it really was not much better than wrapping her own arms around herself.

“Shit, it’s soaking wet with melted snow. Will this help with the cold at all?”

She headed to the exit of the domed facility only to find a pure white landscape beyond the glass door. Only along the heated roads could black asphalt be seen. It may have been partly due to the rows of rectangular concrete buildings, but the scenery just made her feel even colder.

For an instant she considered forgetting it all and turning back, but she stuck with it.

When she opened the glass door and left, she was overcome with regret just as she expected.

“Noo!! This is a lot worse than fighting some military dog!! In fact, I almost wish there was a dog in these clothes!!”

The boy had said he was looking for a connection between the higher ups of Baggage City and the organization known as Gremlin. He had no hint in regards to Gremlin, so his natural next step would be to investigate the higher ups of Baggage City. It was only natural that would lead to him tripping an alarm.

And so Saflee began her search for the spiky-haired boy.

Her primary goal was to ensure that the boy did not get shot by the guards for sticking his head where it did not belong. The secret about Baggage City that the boy seemed to know was a separate issue. She would wait until she knew if it would lead to exhilaration before she decided what to do about it.

So…

“When I find him, I’ll knock him unconscious. That’ll be the quickest way to get him out of danger and hide him from the guards.”

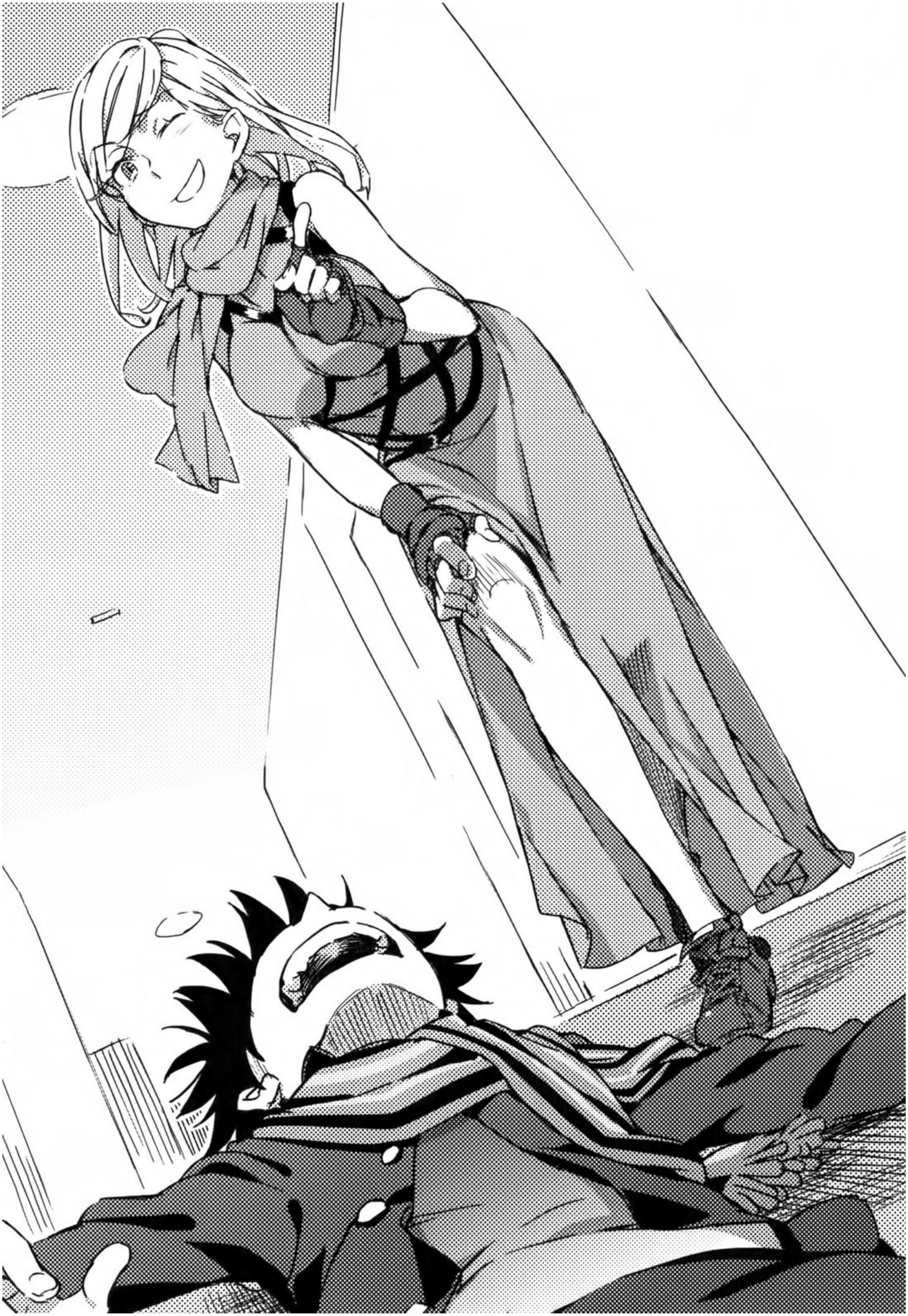
Saflee’s plan was a good example of the motto “simple is best”.

She headed for the closest off-limits area, a former resort hotel that had been turned into an office for the higher ups.

She silenced a group of 3 or 4 guards with her fists when they called out for her to stop, entered the hotel through the business delivery entrance, and managed to catch up to the boy.

“Huh? What are you doing h—?”

“Lariat boom!!”



Kamijou was still not moving, so Saflee grabbed his arm and started to drag him along like a stuffed animal. Naturally, she was dragging him *away* from the mystery he was after. She was dragging him to safety first. Avoiding tragedy was a lot more difficult than creating it and that was why some preparation was needed in the pursuit of exhilaration.

But…

“Miss Saflee Opendays,” an elderly voice said.

A grimace smoothly appeared on Saflee’s face.

She turned around and found an executive surrounded by numerous guards.

He was Weissland Strainikov. Everyone would know him as one of the leaders of Natural Selector even if they had never opened a pamphlet about Baggage City. He was the leader of one of the three large groups making up the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians. After she had completed her objective was one thing, but he was currently not someone she could be angering.

“I appreciate your help in keeping the peace, but you are restricted from this area as well. Now, how about you let us deal with the rest?”

“Are you telling me to hand this boy over to you?”

“If you have anything else to offer us, now would be a good time.”

“Tch,” Saflee clicked her tongue. “So even though he’s been incapacitated and is no longer a threat, you still want to finish him off?”

“If you hand him over, we could possibly avoid that.”

She had no real reason to go that far in standing up for Kamijou Touma.

However, she had a few absolute rules in regards to the exhilaration of destruction.

One of those was to not leave things in a way that left a bad taste in her mouth - that was one of her principles.

However, at the same time, Kamijou Touma had snuck into Baggage City, so she should not have felt any hesitation over handing him in to the authorities.

“And how likely are you to throw him in a cell and then shoot him after I hand him over?”

Weissland did not respond.

Instead, the guards took a large step forward. Among the guards was a flippantly smiling blond man.

“C’mon, this would have been so much easier if you had just promised he would be fine. It didn’t even have to be true,” Saflee said.

“Would that have fooled you into giving him to us?”

“No, I would have been able to quickly tell you were the bad guys, so I could kick your asses without guilt.”

“Then I suppose we can think of you as another intruder.”

“That wasn’t a lie, so I suppose so,” said Saflee with a nonchalant expression. “But that would put me in the same boat as this boy, so I would have to do my best to ensure we got away.”

“What about Natural Selector? Did you not come here in hopes of gaining something in victory?”

“I can always join in as a mysterious masked beauty. I don’t have to obey the tournament style. All I really have to do is prove I’m the best and there are plenty of ways to do that.”

“How strong of you.”

“I’d rather you wait to say that until I’ve proven it.”

“One last question. Can that strength of yours remain undistorted if you use it to help an intruder who will bring danger to Baggage City and the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians?”

“Oh, I think it would be much more distorted were I to abandon him.”

Saflee felt clear killing intent coming from the guards. Normally, there would be no way a single unarmed person who had to carry an unmoving person could stand up to multiple men armed with shotguns. However, Saflee was a candidate for the one who had a means of opposing the espers of Academy City. She was one of the “freaks” that had been invited there because she was expected to possibly go beyond that kind of normal thinking.

However, something else happened before they could clash.

Kamijou Touma spoke.

“…Gh…gh.”

“?”

“No. I think the intruder you’re talking about *isn’t me*.”

With that comment of unknown meaning, Saflee and Weissland’s turned their attention toward Kamijou.

“I came here to stop the intruders you’re talking about.”

“Are you talking about Gremlin?” asked Weissland. “From your actions in Hawaii, it seems you view them as your enemy, but we view things differently. Whatever their ultimate objective is, they cannot attack the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians or Baggage City until it has been achieved. And that does not matter to us. We have never intended to stick with Gremlin to the very end.”

“…No,” said Kamijou Touma as he took slow breaths. “I have to do something about Gremlin, but something else is headed to Baggage City.”

“What?”

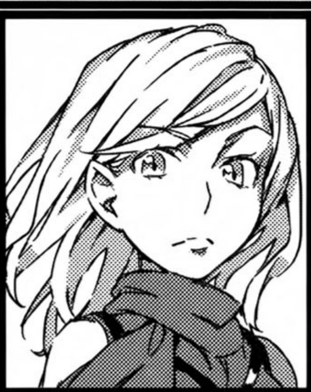
“Did you really think Academy City would wait around doing nothing while you did all this? Of course not. With something as big as this, Academy City would want to nip it in the bud as quickly as possible. They will have sent in some of their very best. Do you really think that would be a high school student who can be taken out with a single lariat?”

“…”

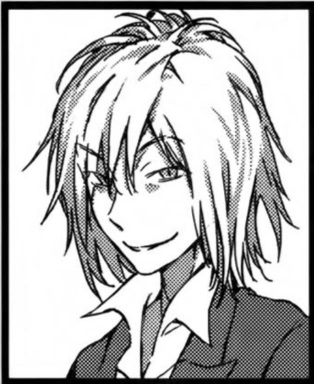
“They are coming,” muttered Kamijou Touma. “They are coming. Your true enemy is coming. They are the deep within Academy City No. 990910991.”

“…Ah?”

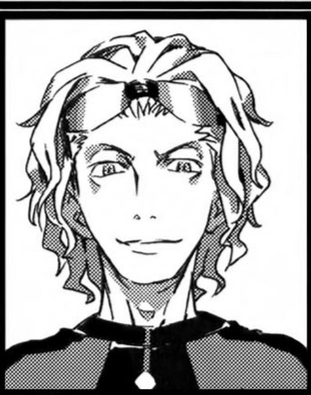
Just after Saflee let out that voice of confusion, *they came*.



Natural Selector competitor
Saffee Opendays



GREMLIN's official member
Útgarða-Loki



Kihara family
Kihara Ransuu

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PERIOD.07

Weissland Strainikov suddenly opened his eyes. He last remembered cornering Kamijou Touma and Saflee Opendays in the business passageway of an off limits resort hotel with some guards. However, he was no longer in that passageway.

He was in the top floor of the high-rise hotel he knew so well.

Weissland was collapsed on his back on the floor in that wide area filled with mountains of documents.

(What happened…?)

His body would not move properly.

His joints trembled stiffly as if he had been chilled for a long period of time in a refrigerator.

And then he heard an unfamiliar and painful voice stab into his consciousness.

“Ahh, ahh, ahh, ahh. No, no, no, no, no. After all the effort I went to fine-tune this, you wake up to an inconsistent scene.”

The voice was that of a young man.

However, it was not the voice of Útgarðа-Loki.

For one thing, this voice was speaking Japanese.

“Hi there. I’m Kihara Ransuu-chan, come from Academy City. Surely, you figured this would happen sooner or later. I don’t have to explain what’s going on, right?”

Weissland was not listening to the words of the Kihara sitting atop the large desk.

He had spotted something horrible.

It was beyond the large window on one side of the high-rise hotel.

An ominous red light was flickering amidst the white scenery of Baggage City. The scenery should have been pure white, but this strange new color was now mixed in. And not in just one place. It had spread across almost the entire area.

Collapsed on his back and unable to move, Weissland worked to get his words out.

“What did you do? What did you do!?”

“Hmm? On a personal level? Or to Baggage City as a whole?”

“I am asking about the innocent residents of this city and the unrelated spectators!!”

“Now, wait just a second. Quit acting like you’re some kind of just hero. Surely you know the difference between justice and a sense of justice. But then, I hate both.”

“What…?”

“Innocent residents? Unrelated spectators? *There’s not even a single person like that here*,” said Kihara Ransuu casually.

If you took the frivolous evil found anywhere and let it solidify in one place, you would have something like the smile of unfathomable darkness on his face.

“The members of the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians fear a counterattack or retaliation from Academy City. Some of them only joined in order to receive protection from Academy City. …But y’see, that’s a problem. If it was just one or two, whatever. But when you start moving people in the millions, that gets to be an issue. It takes time and money, and information has a way of leaking out. If they’re attacked on the way, it’s all over.”

As Kihara Ransuu sat on the desk, the red flames grew larger in the window behind him.

“So I’d say all these Natural Selector spectators are actually part of the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians, or their beloved family, friends, or lovers. *Not even one of them is some unrelated person*. Oh, and this includes the people who supposedly lived here before. After moving millions of people to this one place for the tournament, some will be brought into your fortress on the pretext of returning home. Of course, Academy City would find that suspicious, but if you can get them inside before any proof can be found, it’s not a problem, right?” Kihara Ransuu crossed his legs and grinned. “So let’s not play these little games. I can just think of everyone here as an enemy or someone with some connection to an enemy. Oh, and a few other Kiharas were sent here too. They’ll be having their own fun in other parts of the city. I don’t really know what they’re up to, though. When I attacked my quota or section or whatever, it all ended way too easily!! Since it seems like it’ll take some time before the other Kiharas are done, I decided to have some fun with you to kill some time.”

“It ended…way too easily?”

Weissland could not grasp what he meant.

He was not in denial.

He truly could not keep up. Even so, he could hear an ominous ring to what Kihara Ransuu was saying.

Meanwhile, Kihara spread his arms wide in a dramatic fashion and shrugged.

“That’s right!! Since you Anti-Academy City Science Guardians required sending in a group of Kiharas, I assumed things were gonna be pretty bad. But I get here and I’m like, what the hell was that!? That was nothing!! Nothing at all!! What you call security was nothing more than an obstacle course. It wasn’t worth anything more than having a bit of fun. What do you take us for anyway? Do you know how many Kiharas were sent out to eliminate all of the traitors, be they regulars, substitutes, spectators, guests, or supporting characters!?”

“Wh-what happened to Útgarðа-Loki?”

He had been sent from Gremlin. Instead of the military force of a group, he had the power of an individual that showed its true worth when an irregular enemy appeared.

However, the man naming himself a Kihara frowned like he was listening to someone talking about a leading figure in a genre of music he did not care for as if that person should be known by everyone on earth.

“Is that a tongue twister or some kind of technical term? Eh? It’s someone’s name? You idiot. I don’t know the names of the individual people!! The guy’s probably smashed to a pulp with all the other small fries. Hmm, I do recall hearing something about a favorite for winning Natural Selector using magic. I remember crushing him, but I don’t remember his name. He was a fake, but he did have a unique way of begging for his life. Eh? That isn’t who you’re talking about?”

“…”

“Well, whatever. He’s probably dead. All the other leaders are in pretty much the same situation. And if he’s dead, he wasn’t worth much anyway, right?”

Kihara Ransuu so easily and casually spoke of the fate of an official member of Gremlin while scratching at his head. And it went farther than that. His comment about the “other leaders” was an announcement that they were targeting the representatives of the 27 companies making up the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians.

He said it so lightly.

He said it so simply.

He overturned all of the previously established assumptions.

“Impossible… But how…?”

“I don’t know about the other Kiharas, but for me, it’s this.” Kihara Ransuu moved his hand around randomly in what looked like empty space. “My specialty is world peace. Oh, is that not enough of an explanation for you? Think of it like this. There are various famous international competitions in things like soccer or track and field. People around the world get all excited and have fun while obeying common rules. In that time, things like race, belief, and national borders no longer matter and people feel a strong unity. Now what would happen if that kind of thing was artificially created?”

“I…don’t understand. What does that have to do with what is going on here?”

“If you still don’t understand, that’s just cause you’re an idiot. It’s all chemicals in the end. They’re what increase or decrease people’s emotions. I’ve taken tiny particles with the same effects as the chemicals secreted in the brain and scatter them on mold. The tech has its base in research derived from the #5’s Five Over series.”

“Five Over…?”

“If that isn’t enough, it isn’t worth explaining further. With wind, temperature change, and static electricity, it’s not too hard to control once you get used to it. Having it spread in the direction you want and ensuring a safe zone can be handled with a single program. During their sweet dreams, everyone just stands around. Do you understand now?”

An illusion.

It was simple enough to say, but the level of technology required to show a certain person the image you wanted them to see was unimaginable.

“It’s still not easy, though. The chemicals themselves have names like Red Fury 03 and Blue Fear 07, so anyone with a middle school level knowledge of English can tell they increase certain emotions. The real trick is combining them in the right way to give the experience you want. When you also want to affect multiple people at the same time, it starts to be something like cooking. Well, just like how what you eat affects how you smell, the substances in your blood have external effects, so it isn’t like I don’t get any kind of hint.”

If what Kihara Ransuu was saying was true, how long had Weissland Strainikov been seeing an illusion? Since he had confronted Saflee Opendays? Since he had spoken with Útgarða-Loki? Or had that conversation actually occurred within the “experience” and they had both been seeing an illusion?

“Anyway, don’t you find it a little odd how when Kamijou Touma gets here he struggles but eventually tries to save both enemy and ally? You’re the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians. You’re clearly in opposition to him. No matter how irregular a hero he may be, this world isn’t the kind of place that allows him to do that at a point like this. If it was, we Kiharas would have lost our place in the world long ago.”

By spreading mold covered in chemicals that threw the brain into disorder, he had shown the guards of Baggage City illusions so they merely mindlessly stood in place.

In that state of temporary incapacitation, he had finished each of them off, one by one.

How much of it was true was unknown. It was possible it was all a lie. But whatever the answer, flames were truly spreading through Baggage City, Weissland was unable to move, and a strange attacker sat before him.

His situation was hopeless.

As the one in control of that situation, Kihara Ransuu slowly brought his feet down from the large table and to the floor. He held a smartphone in his hand. Weissland guessed it was what he used to send signals to the mold. However, the screen was not displaying some complex set of controls. It was merely a video player application.

“Now, let’s get this started.”

“Wh-what more are you going to do to Baggage City?”

“I already told you, the other Kiharas are in charge of that. I have nothing to do because I finished up so quickly, so *I just need to kill some time*.”

“…”

It did not even progress to the point of a fight.

Getting the help of Gremlin had been no use whatsoever.

The difference in power was so great, it simply did not seem real. Kihara Ransuu approached further. Once he was right next to Weissland, he crouched down showed Weissland the footage being displayed.

“Recognize these people? You should, they’re your wife, your daughter, your son-in-law, and your two grandkids.”

“…!?”

If the enemy already knew about the plan to move millions of related people to Baggage City under the guise of spectators of the Natural Selector tournament, it was not surprising that they would know that much.

However, seeing it displayed right in front of him was like a sharp knife to the chest for Weissland.

“Okay, let’s get started!! The rules have been switched up a bit, but we’ll be playing a game of Russian roulette!!”

Displayed on the screen were 5 chairs lined up next to each other. Each one held someone Weissland knew quite well bound in it and handguns were attached to poles such that one was aimed directly at each person’s face.

Each handgun had a numbered label attached.

“Now then, it’s time for a quiz! Our contestant is Weissland Strainikov!! I’ll explain the rules! Only one of those five handguns is loaded!! You choose a single one. If no bullet comes out, they all go free! Quite simple, don’t you think? Now, will our contestant be able to correctly choose a safe gun and regain his family bonds!?”

“Wh-what…!?”

“Using the questioner’s mental state as a clue is fair game! Searching for a hint in the video footage is fine too! You’re also free to pray to god and choose at random! Or you can choose a family member you’ve always hated! But be careful, Mr. Weissland!! Your time limit is only one minute. If you do not answer within 60 seconds, the ‘real’ gun will be fired!!”

“You would do this…just to kill time…? How can Academy City go this far…!?”

“I don’t care how this turns out, so just hurry it up. I mean, if someone does die, that’s just more resources for me.”

That comment of unknown meaning oozed into Weissland’s ears.

“The thing about humans is you can get mold to grow on them if all the good bacteria is scrubbed away from the surface of the body. Did you know that? But the molds that have a taste for people really are something else. Well, there’s no real scientific basis for that claim. Really, the only problem is that the types that eat living humans are much livelier than the ones that go for corpses.”

“…”

Weissland could not believe what he was hearing.

That went beyond just a threat. Kihara Ransuu simply said it all too easily. To him, covering living people’s bodies with mold was nothing worth getting worked up over.

Weissland had to choose someone and then the trigger would be pulled.

One of the guns was loaded.

From a purely probabilistic standpoint, the odds of no one getting hurt were much higher, but the possibility of choosing the wrong one kept him frozen in fear. However, he had to choose. If he did not, someone would die for sure.

“D-do I get a hint?”

“Only if you can find one.”

“Shit!! Please, I’ll do anything. You can take one of my arms or eyes in exchange. Just give me a hint!!”

“Twenty seconds left. Do I need to start a countdown!?”

He had no time. A family member was going to die. As he realized that, tears gushed from his eyes like a child. He had not time to think. He gathered all his strength into his barely functioning arm and touched the smartphone screen with a trembling fingertip.

“Number three, hm? Is that your lucky number?”

“…”

“Really, choosing the son-in-law doesn’t really come as a surprise. Are you the type that sees a blood relation as above all else? Or were you against your daughter’s marriage?”

“Wh-was that one loaded?”

“You wanna know? Are you hoping it wasn’t loaded? Or that it was?”

“How could you ask that!?”

“At the very least, I know you had to choose him. Now, time for the moment of truth!!”

Kihara Ransuu spun the smartphone around in his hand before pointing the screen back toward Weissland.

“The footage you’re seeing here is not live. *This is from the past.*”

“What?”

“But your entry into the touchscreen was directly linked to the trigger! In other words, you essentially pulled the trigger yourself!!”

Having the timing switched up on him after he had already prepared himself caused Weissland’s fingertips to tremble even more.

However, Kihara Ransuu's cruelty did not end there.

"And the biggest climax is yet to come!! Remember when I told you only one of the guns was loaded? That was a lie. The real answer is that *all the guns were loaded*!! Don't you love quizzes so simple that you'd have to actually try to get it wrong!?"

"!!!???"

"And so our contestant has pulled the trigger that killed one of his family members!! The odds are 100%! One! Hundred!! Percent!!! How does it feel to have blown out the brains of your son-in-law!?"

Weissland could do nothing but flap his mouth open and closed while Kihara Ransuu put on a satisfied smile at having achieved his goal there.

"It seems he is so overcome with emotion that he has been left speechless. Now, let's take a look at the real footage…or rather, the live footage!!"

"Stop…"

"By the way, the family was only told that Mr. Weissland would be choosing who would die, so make sure to take a look at the survivor's faces!! Now, have the familial bonds been shattered!? Can his five-year-old grandchild hold onto her sanity after seeing her father's brains blown out right in front of her!? This shocking footage has plenty to focus on!!"

"Stoooooooooooooooooooppppppppppppppppppp!!"

Weissland yelled to the point that the capillaries in his eyes burst and he cried literal tears of blood. However, his cries did not reach Kihara Ransuu. No, they did reach him, but they only made him enjoy himself even more.

The screen switched over to the scene after the tragedy.

What it showed was…

"…Ah?" grunted Kihara Ransuu in confusion.

What should have been displayed was a scene of fresh blood and panicked civilians bound to chairs. Anything else made no sense.

And yet something else was what he found.

The chairs were there. As were the handguns. However, the hostages were nowhere to be found. It wasn't just the son-in-law missing; they were all gone. The ropes used to bind them were lying on the ground, but the hostages were nowhere to be seen. While Kihara Ransuu had not been looking, something had happened. But what?

“Who the fuck interfered with my fuuuuuunnnnnnn!! I put a lot of effort into this, so who the hell do they think they…hmm??”

His shout turned to a question partway through.

Something was visible at the edge of the footage.

A figure could just barely be seen.

The figure was likely the one who had freed Weissland’s family.

The figure was a spiky-haired Asian boy.

“I’m glad to see you’re still in a state where you’re able to see this,” said the person in the footage.

The boy had proven with deeds rather than words that he intended to save his enemies as well as his allies.

He ignored Kihara Ransuu and spoke to the restrained Weissland Strainikov.

“I’ll take care of the guy with you soon enough, too. That will resolve all of this.”

The screen shook.

With a wave of static, the signal cut out.

He had likely crushed the camera between his hands.

The boy would of course be there soon just as he had announced.

“…”

Kihara Ransuu’s thoughts cut out for a bit. He could not believe that boy would truly get involved. But then he shook his head.

“Yeah, right,” he muttered. “Nothing’s that convenient!! The timing’s just too perfect and it came out of nowhere! There’s no way he would swoop in at exactly the right time like some kind of hero!! But then what the hell is going on!? How did something this lame end up happening in this world!?”

And then he realized something.

He realized the sole reason Kamijou Touma had appeared where he absolutely should not have been.

Kihara Ransuu himself had been caught in a trick set by Weissland and the others from the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians in Baggage City.

He could only think of only one possibility.

At the very least, it was the only possibility he found more likely than Kamijou Touma truly having appeared there.

"*Is this…an illusion too…*?"

◆

"Cough, cough…!! Pant, pant…!!"

As a few piles of documents collapsed, the Gremlin magician known as Útgarða-Loki slowly stood up. His body was covered in blood and the collapsed documents were stained red. Kihara Ransuu had driven him to the verge of death, but he had succeeded in activating an illusion at the very end.

The name Útgarða-Loki referred to a giant of Norse mythology, and this giant had been an expert in all kinds of illusions and had even fully duped Thor, a major player in the mythology. Given that, the magician's specialty was obvious.

"Th-that was a close one… That bastard went the superhuman route from the very beginning!!"

His front teeth were broken and he could only see out of one eye due to all the blood. Even so, he had survived. His magic allowed him to transfer the information sent to one of the five senses to a different sense. Simply put, he could make someone feel the pain of burning by showing them a picture of fire. Used correctly, that ability held quite a bit of destructive power, but many materials used together in the right way were needed to give a more accurate and long-lasting illusion.

Even so, he had managed to survive.

He had no idea if Weissland was still alive, but ensuring his own safety took top priority. To do that, he had to do something about Kihara Ransuu who stood mindlessly in the middle of the room. He had no idea how long the illusion would last on the man.

"Now then…"

Útgarða-Loki slowly grabbed a random pile of documents. The documents were A4 size and the pile was about 10 cm thick. The weight felt like more than that of a brick.

He unhesitatingly raised the blunt weapon.

"Don't make!! An illusion specialist!! Like me!! Have to!! Do any!! Physical work!!!!!"

After knocking him to the ground, Útgarða-Loki climbed on top of him and continued sending dozens of blows down on the man. Partway through, the sounds of the impacts became more wet and sticky sounding and Kihara Ransuu's body convulsed on the floor, utterly defenseless. When the documents soaked up enough blood to be of no more use, Útgarða-Loki tossed them aside and grabbed a new nearby pile.

"Ha ha ha!! Ha ha ha ha ha!! I won dammit. I finally have my safety. I've returned to the world of the living! I! Am! Aliiiiiiiiiiivvveeee!!"

Útgarða-Loki wiped the blood from his hands with documents of unknown value and then wiped the blood from his face. The dry paper scratched, but he saw that as proof that he was alive in the real world.

Someone then tapped Útgarða-Loki's shoulder from behind.

The illusion expert turned around and saw…

A spiky-haired Asian boy standing there.

SUB.08

"WHAT THE HELL?! WHAWHAWHAWHAWHAWHA WHAT JUST HAPPENED!?"

One of the guards, Shar Berylan, crouched down on the white snowy field as he yelled. In the -20 degrees Celsius environment, this would normally be considered suicidal. However, it was easy to imagine that if he lifts his head up now, he would die faster than freezing to death. His aim was to hide his body; thus, he couldn't hide on the road that had melted the snow by thermal effect.

"DIDN'T THEY SAY THAT WE CAN MATCH THE ENEMY IN POWER IF WE USE ACADEMY CITY'S UNMANNED WEAPONS!!?"

Even though he roared into the radio, he couldn't get a response. He couldn't get through with a cell phone either.

Then, in front of him, a large block-shaped object dropped. It was the remains of the powered suits that used unmanned technology, the ones that had torn through the Russian tanks and armored vehicles in World War III.

Yes, the remains.

The sturdy complex armor looked like it was cheese eaten through by mice as tens of thousands of holes had pierced through it. It was unknown if the armor became like this because it had approached an anti-tank mine and triggered an explosion. There wasn't even remains of just one. If Shar could have stood up and looked around, he would have found that even the blizzard couldn't hide the large amount of the barricade-forming debris.

"…This is completely preposterous."

Shar blankly muttered to himself.

A large weapon with the silhouette resembling that of a mantis moved forward with broad steps. Its two front legs seemed to have Gatling guns, but the scale of destruction was obviously completely different. Was this scene of disaster caused by the firepower of a tank's smoothbore gun firing thousands of cannon rounds every minute? To be honest, there was no obvious reason to bind a gun to a set cannon fire rate…unless, it was out of bad taste.

FIVE_Over.

Modelcase_”RAILGUN”.

Shar didn’t understand the meaning of the writing on the machine, but he could tell that it was a monster. This monster was spewing out a large amount of cannon shells. The monsters were either moving on the snowy plains or flying in the skies, and Shar could identify at least 20 of the machines.

It was blatantly the oncoming generation one.

It was like using stealth bombers on cavalry.

It was no longer a matter of mere supernatural powers. These were not the only weapons of Academy City. There were a lot of weird people gathered in the Natural Selector tournament, but it was impossible to imagine that they could defeat those large mantises barehanded.

We can’t win, Shar immediately thought. We can’t win like this. Our idea of trying to take the initiative was wrong. Defeat aside, he was even wondering if escape would be a form of victory. If he were to decide, it was just a matter of whether to resist till death, or not resist and die.

Which path would be more painful?

Which path would gain more honor?

Which path would gain redemption?

Shar felt that it was similar to security software. In a certain faraway country, with a single mouse click, a large numbers of unmanned weapons could begin to take action to clean up any antagonistic parties—or rather, eliminate them. During this process, the details of actions taken would have no bearing at all. Once shown ‘there’s 0 enemies remaining’, everyone would rejoice. It was this kind of war.

They had made a mistake in fighting this enemy.

They had made a mistake in how they fought.

If there was an enemy, there would be a massacre. It was this kind of war. Thus, there was no differentiation between Academy City and the Anti-Academy City forces. The moment the virus list in the security software updated, they lost all chance of being spared. Shar and the rest were just elevated to the level in the latest generation of the update where they were to be eliminated.

They were then discovered.

They were then attacked.

They were then killed.

"…"

At this moment, Shar Berylan held his breath.

All of the sounds vanished.

He knew what this unnatural silence meant. His teeth were chattering, and he remained prone on the ground as he slowly lifted his head. As the degree of motion was too awkward, his head throbbed, but there was no time to be concerned with that.

It flew.

It stopped.

The large machine resembling a mantis had flown like a bee or a dragonfly above Shar's head. The sickle-shaped arm pointed the Gatling gun and aimed at Shar. As he watched the cluster barrel spin rapidly, *Ahh, it's not that sounds have vanished, but that there's something wrong with my head*, Shar finally realized.

However, the machine didn't continue.

This monster seemed likely to be linked with a mobile radar as it could even shoot down fighter planes and the air-to-surface missiles. Thus, even if he continued to roll a few times like those action movies, there wouldn't be any change to the outcome.

It was over.

Just like how viruses are killed, I'll be cleaned off and represented with a kill counter of + 1.

Just when Shar Berylan thought about this,

A strange change happened.

The mantis' behavior suddenly changed. It wasn't just the one machine that was aiming at Shar from above, as he could see that the other 20+ machines' guns were pointed at a certain location. It was clearly a precautionary move. The powered suits had clearly gone from searching for the enemy to eliminate them and dispatching the 'enemy' to seeking out the 'enemy' again.

(What, what's going on?)

The sweat on Shar’s body was stuck. He continued to lie on the ground with his eyes being the only part of his body moving. Someone was on the edge of his vision. In this white hell, a silhouette was standing there.

It wore a long coat.

A helmet covered its face.

It had an androgynous profile that made it hard to tell whether it was male or female. He didn’t know whether this would improve the situation, but Shar felt that it was strange for the surrounding mantises to focus on that person.

“…”

That person remained silent.

Again, the person merely clenched his right hand tightly.

SUB.09

Oumi Shuri was a competitor within Natural Selector and a kunoichi of the Kouga school. Her body had been modified to the point that she looked around 10 years old despite actually being older than 30. Various diseases existed that stopped one's body from growing, so it was not an impossible thing to do. That alone would merely lead to her aging according to her years but with a small body. However, things like the Clostridium botulinum bacteria could be used to maintain the skin and preserve the look of a child on the surface.

She wore a showier outfit than usual for the official matches, but it was still not too different from her normal role. The cheerleader-like outfit and the school bag strapped on her back over one shoulder gave her an overall unnatural look. However, that out of place feeling worked to Oumi Shuri's advantage given her role as the first one to appear on the scene.

In terms of stage magic, she was the misdirection.

She gathered everyone's focus which created a blind spot. That safe area could then be used by her comrades to employ their own tricks. That was how they pulled off the miraculous-seeming ninja strategies that their enemies could not keep up with. This meant her role was an absolutely crucial cornerstone to it all. It was the core needed for success.

A showily dressed ninja seemed counterintuitive, but hers was an all important role that decided the fate of the entire team.

Of course, by showing up first and gathering all the attention, the enemy focused all their attacks on her.

The fact that she had survived such dangerous situations showed just how skilled Oumi Shuri truly was.

Unlike the other competitors, the foundation of Oumi Shuri and the Kouga's strategies lay in working in teams, but what she wanted from Natural Selector was quite simple.

She wanted to achieve the ninja techniques that used true supernatural powers like the ones seen in movies or dramas.

She wanted to obtain the technical foundation for those.

Simply put, she (or rather, they) did not want the glory of being the champion of Natural Selector. They understood that they would not approach the supernatural simply by expanding on the realistic ninja techniques they already had. Their plan was to fight the other competitors, determine if their abilities would be of any use, and analyze any systems or information that they thought they could use. By only working behind the scenes no matter how far they entered the spotlight was how Oumi Shuri and the others had carried on the Kouga name to the 21st century.

Some of them believed it would be faster to infiltrate Japan's Academy City to analyze supernatural powers, and a different faction of the Kouga had in fact already done so.

However, that would not work.

They would not give in to Academy City. They would not submit to them and ask for their leftovers. The Kouga ninja were global, so the concept of national boundaries meant nothing to them, but they were still more a part of Japan's "darkness" than anything else. For that reason, Oumi Shuri and the others did not wish to get too close to Academy City.

That was why they were in Baggage City.

That was why they were in the Natural Selector tournament.

That was why they were approaching the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians.

Or so it should have been.

"Why is Baggage City being destroyed on the first day of the tournament?" muttered Oumi Shuri as she ran down a narrow and winding passageway.

She was in the underground area of Baggage City. As Baggage City was one of the snowiest areas in the world, its hot water heating facility was effectively the city's lifeline. A network of underground hot water pipes connected to the various buildings in the city, and labyrinthine underground passageways had been built under the entire city to maintain those pipes.

Naturally, those passageways were off limits.

However, no one remained to stop her. She skillfully moved her hand that had been purposefully kept small and a silver sparkling blade spun around. It was a one-handed gardening trowel. After all, even the traditional kunai had its roots as a digging tool rather than a projectile.

(I doubt any of the other competitors are going to accept that the fight is over just because the official tournament may be over. They all had their reasons for coming here. As long as they can still use Baggage City to get what they want, the fight will continue even with the ring and rules shattered.)

Oumi Shuri thought as she hid her presence and checked her surroundings.

(This is just a difference between fighting in the ring and outside it. Even if the rulers are gone, our Natural Selector will continue. I should assume I will have to fight any other competitors I run across.)

Beyond that, there was one more thing she had to keep in mind.

Her natural enemy.

An enemy she absolutely had to keep in mind if she was to survive.

And ironically, this enemy was also an outsider but not a registered competitor in Natural Selector.

Baggage City and the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians in charge had been overwhelmingly crushed by an elite unit known as the Kiharas that Academy City, the embodiment of the science side, had sent.

That was bad enough on its own, but it seemed Baggage City had also had a secret weapon. She had overheard them use the term Gremlin, but she had no idea what it meant.

Oumi Shuri had come across this information in *various ways* such as listening in on their conversations during battle or from the Baggage City defensive units during their final moments. However, she could not believe any of what they were saying. She started to think they might be using some kind of code because she could not see how it could be literally true.

Irrational violence versus irrational violence.

Things had gone beyond merely getting involved with the supernatural. An overwhelming oppression squeezed at the hearts of all who were there.

Was this what she and her comrades were going to learn from?

Was it right to learn from something like that?

Would it not lead to the entire Kouga organization gaining more enemies in the end?

With those vague concerns, Oumi Shuri continued to run through the winding passageway in search of a safe spot from which to gather information.

As she ran, she could hear explosions and feel tremors coming from multiple directions.

She had no idea if Natural Selector would be able to continue, but that was no reason for her to end her mission. She would instead try to gather some hints from the opponent strong enough to bring down the entire tournament.

At a corner near the center of one of the tremors, Oumi Shuri pressed her back up against the wall.

Using a small microphone connected by cables in her clothes to a radio, she contacted the others working with her.

“Sakata, Asai, Yasu. Can you hear me? I have run across a ‘treasure’ in Area 32 of the East Block. However, I am unsure if I alone am enough to bring it back safely. In the name of backup, I would like others recording from different angles. Can you get in place in time?”

With a bit of static, familiar voices responded.

However, the emotion in the voices was not familiar.

“Shit. I can’t shake her!!”

“Wha—? You damn monster!!”

“I’m being over taken!!”

A high-pitched noise stabbed into Oumi’s ear. At first she thought it was static, but she was wrong. Something she could not identify was occurring on the other end of the transmission.

“Yeah, yeah… It makes me feel a bit awkward, but I guess I don’t have a choice…”

Oumi Shuri heard a delicate girl’s voice.

This voice she did not recognize. And it likely belonged to the one causing the chaos.

“*I understand, Amata-ojichan. A Kihara would do something like this!!*”

Loud noises of solid objects breaking and wet sounds like soft fruit being crushed continued for a bit after that.

It sounded as if a giant maw was eating a human.

“Shit,” cursed Oumi Shuri.

She tried to contact the other members again, but did not receive the reassuring responses she had hoped for. Those desperately asking for help and those on the verge of death were better than the alternative: most of them gave no response at all.

The situation had developed beyond human understanding.

Oumi Shuri felt it was best to assume the Kouga unit had been swallowed up by that situation and annihilated.

(I won’t die empty-handed.)

With her back still to the wall next to the corner, she turned her attention to the monstrous Kihara or Gremlin rampaging around that corner.

(I will bring back a “treasure”. I will free the Kouga from that feeling of being at our limit. I must face this threat in order to say farewell to our inability to keep up with this threat!!)

The for-show school bag on her back had a security buzzer on the shoulder strap. After checking that the camera in the small device was functioning, she focused on controlling her breathing.

She did not have to win.

She did not even have to fight.

To benefit the Kouga as a whole, she only had to peer in, record even a fragment of the knowledge there, and bring it back. Her purpose was not to show off her presence like a hero or a monster. She was acting so that the “treasure” could be used in the future.

With that in mind, she used all of her ability to blend into the background.

And then…

Oumi Shuri heard a rustling sound from behind her.

As she had her back to the hot water pipe maintenance passageway wall and was turning to peer around the corner, the noise came from an absolute blind spot. Also, it came from an area that cut off her path of retreat.

“!?”

She immediately spun around. Only a few meters away was a man in a military uniform. It seemed the man had happened across her by chance. What had looked like lockers lining the wall had actually been openings to other narrow passageways.

Was he a Baggage City security guard? A Kihara? Or was he whatever Gremlins was? She had no idea who he was, but what she had to do remained the same.

(I have to take him out!!)

She focused on the gardening trowel-type kunai in her dominant hand, but the man took action quicker. He was already swinging down a blade that was more a machete than a knife.

She did not have time to take offensive action.

She might have been able to kill the man, but he would definitely kill her in the process.

That left only the option of avoiding the man's first attack and then counterattacking. But…

(With the length of his legs and the length of his weapon, he has a range of 3 meters if he takes one step. I don't have enough space to move back with that corner there!!)

Oumi Shuri clicked her tongue and reached for the cloth lunch bag hanging from the school bag. It was actually a spare equipment pouch and she grabbed the powerful light installed on the bottom. While stepping a bit backwards but not far enough to be out of range, she hit the switch and sent a flash of light at the wall directly behind her.

Immediately afterwards, the blade swung down from above.

The sound of slicing wind caused her pulse to quicken.

But…

"!?"

"Nice try, but you missed."

The sharp tip of the blade had passed right by the end of Oumi Shuri's nose, but her young eyes did not even blink. She had clearly known she was safe.

The man had misjudged the distance. She had made sure he would. The human eye could not accurately judge the distances of objects placed over a pure white background. The flash of bright light Oumi Shuri had sent behind her had reflected back and created a makeshift white screen.

Now that she had avoided the first attack, it was time for her counterattack.

Before the man could deliver a second attack, she rushed in close and stabbed the tip of her gardening trowel-type kunai in toward the man’s stomach.

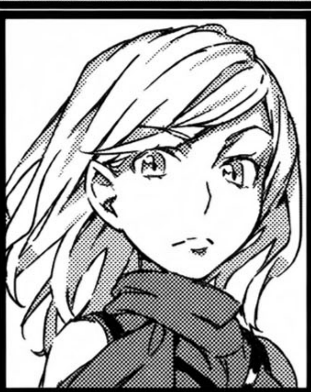
Victory was surely hers.

However, the tip of the kunai never reached the man’s stomach.

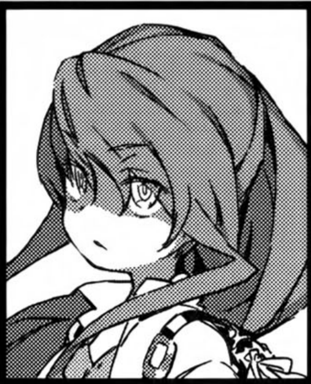
It was blocked.

But not by the man in the military uniform.

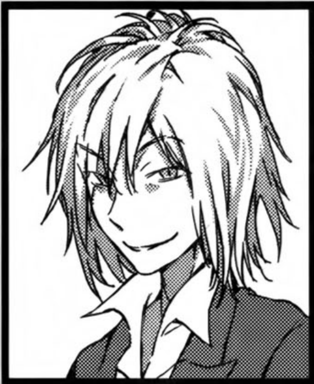
It had been blocked by a user of the truly absurd supernatural powers that Oumi Shuri longed for.



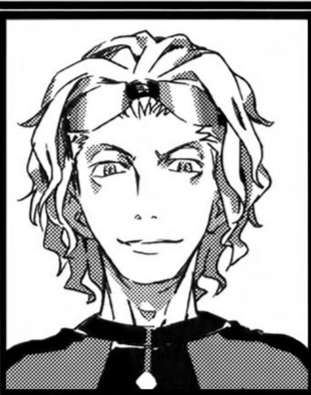
Natural Selector competitor
Saflee Opendays



Natural Selector competitor
Oumi Shuri



GREMLIN's official member
Útgarða-Loki



Kihara family
Kihara Ransuu

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SUB.10

‘This person’ had her hair tied in locks and was dressed up as a maid. However, it wasn’t the get-up of someone working in an old French-style city, but the get-up of a maid on a certain electronics street, giving out leaflets that were poorly designed and had a fluorescent yellow based color. The mini-skirt, the frills, the black corset and the psychedelic outfit that broke historical tradition were extremely abnormal.

However, what was more ridiculous than this get-up was the way ‘this person’ showed up.

Directly under the militaristic man.

The girl that crouched her body seemed to have gotten under the opponent’s feet as she launched a sudden attack on Oumi Shuri.

GANK!! With a stiff sound, the girl’s hands grabbed Oumi Shuri’s garden shovel kunai. The girl in maid clothing showed a smile and went over to whisper,

“That’s enough of a commotion. If you want to say that you can only be redeemed through killing, I’ll just have you be on your way.”

Immediately after,

The girl used her hands to grab Oumi Shuri’s kunai, and her leg was suddenly extended out to the ceiling. This wasn’t aimed at the face of the man in military attire. The inside of the slender leg of the girl curled and held itself around his wrist that was holding the dagger like a handcuff.

The girl then spun.

Her other leg on the ground kicked off hard. With Oumi Shuri’s kunai as the axis, GLUNK!! Her legs spun like bamboo dragonflies. The pain that came with her wrist being grabbed caused Oumi Shuri to let go of the kunai. The maid then spun again while using her hand to grab onto the inside of the military-dressed man’s knee. Unknowingly, the girl’s head was higher than the man’s position. She then used the knee of the leg she used to leap up to slam hard into the man’s jaw.

“Oh my.”

The knee was buried into the man’s face, and the girl moved it outside before using the other leg that was holding down the opponent’s wrist to press down on the man’s shoulder. She didn’t care that she was wearing a mini-skirt and pressed her entire weight down. She had positioned herself where she could restrain the man’s head with her thighs, causing the man to fall back like that.

“Alright.”

A blunt sound rang.

The girl who sat on the man checked that her butt and the floor pancaked the target and made him lose consciousness. She stood up and used both hands to toy with the dagger and the kunai.

“…Um. Did I give too much service? I deliberately used such shameful actions to hurt my pride a little bit, but I’m able to fulfill the life experience of this fallen person…honestly, my talent’s really troubling me.”

As she watched the girl mutter, Oumi Shuri cautiously put her hands behind her back.

On first look, it seemed that she wanted to use a tricky fighting technique of using her arms before kicking out with her legs. However, this alone wouldn’t be enough to explain her actions. Everyone knew that Kouga ninja skills were rationalized through logical circumstances. Thus, she knew that it was impossible to do that action using a human body’s muscles. However, no matter how she thought about it, there were a lot of paradoxes to it, but this person did go in on the target.

It was obviously a supernatural power.

This was the person who used something Oumi Shuri wanted.

“Who are you?”

“Mm—. Kumokawa Maria.”

The girl dressed in the strange maid outfit clearly introduced herself.

“I’m from Academy City, but don’t worry. I have no relation to those people who attacked this city. I’m not a participant of the Natural Selector, but our goal is the same. Like you, I’m here to watch battles between monsters. But speaking of which, I’m just simply looking for someone.”

“…”

Even though she said that, their levels of resolve were far different.

Oumi Shuri, who systematically joined the Natural Selector to safely obtain information about supernatural powers, and Kumokawa Maria, who snuck in even under the premise that she would end up in a fierce fight with the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians.

To be honest, if Oumi Shuri had known that it would be this dangerous, she could have changed her plans.

Either way, it would be bothersome if her aims were known by others.

Oumi Shuri took out a shuriken behind her back, but Kumokawa Maria warned her, perhaps to stop her,

“Don’t do that. If you don’t have a water cannon loaded with liquid red pepper, you won’t be able to hurt my eyes. If you want to hurt my pride, you better bring along a flamethrower.”

“I do have steamed yellow mustard and fresh green wasabi.”

“Au—…forget about the peppers. There’s a risk that I could lose my vision with wasabi. Speaking of which, those don’t have the JIS mark, right?”

Either way, Kumokawa Maria ended the conversation with this.

“Even if we fight, you’ll be the loser. If you’re fine with that, be my guest, but whenever possible, I try to avoid meaningless battles. It’s not an interesting experience to kill off a life I barely managed to save. To be honest, my pride that was slightly hurt just now may snap.”

“Why, why are you so confident…?”

“I don’t think I would lose to an opponent that could only use both hands to fight when I use all 4 limbs. My hands can be used for walking, and I can use my right hand and right leg to jump pretty far, you know? However, it’ll be many times more cumbersome, and I would still need some time to plan.”

Oumi Shuri pondered for a while, and then answered,

“You’re lying.”

“Did I get found out? It’s impossible for me to jump far, but it’s possible for me to use my right hand and right foot to throw or twist. I can use my right leg for kendo and my left leg to throw a javelin. The professionals would be furious if I used my feet to wield a bamboo sword though. But I won’t lose.”

“…”

Oumi Shuri tried to draw out the water cannon of liquid red pepper that was hidden under her skirt and quickly fire it. Immediately after, Kumokawa Maria's head moved 180 degrees to where her knee had just been. She didn't care that what was under her mini-skirt was exposed as she lifted a leg towards the sky to maintain her balance before using her right hand and leg to stand.

"This would make it difficult to attack, and there are drastic changes in some fatal areas. This is a fighting skill that's most suited against those who fight on two legs, which means that this wasn't good at all."

Hyun Hyun. Kumokawa gently spun around like a ballet dancer. Her head and limbs returned back to position too.

"However, if you originally attacked me, logically, I should be using my hand to grab onto your foot, and then my foot will slam onto your head. It doesn't matter when it's a trial period, but I suppose free service time is over?"

However, Oumi Shuri realized that this skill wasn't perfect.

No matter whether it was a hit, a grappling move, or a throw, the power would be closely related to the enemy's mass. A tricky movement probably wouldn't use that much mass to move, but it was likely that Kumokawa Maria used the unique spinning movement to increase her power.

Or rather, it was a supernatural power that couldn't be explained from before.

Centrifuge force.

"Then, how about it? A match?"

"You got it."

Oumi Shuri reached a hand out, and Kumokawa Maria tossed the confiscated gardening trowel-type kunai back at her. Oumi Shuri had her weapon back and thought.

Right now, what she should do wasn't to seek victory just to prove her existence.

But to use the "treasure" known as the supernatural power to build a bridge leading to victory.

Thus, even if she was looked down on, she shouldn't feel hurt. Or rather, the stubborn insistence on the meaningless victory and benefit and getting beaten without leaving anything behind would be even more senseless.

Kumokawa Maria said to Oumi Shuri as she pondered,

"What do you intend to do?"

“What, what do you mean?”

“The detour. I’m asking you if you intend to peep there.”

Explosions and tremors.

Right now, at where the detour was, it seemed that the storm between the Kiharas and Gremlin continued. It was a battle between humans who were using knowledge that surpassed humanity and wits to survive to the fullest.

She already used all her strength just to spy on them.

She would definitely die if she became involved.

And she couldn’t distinguish between these two. Besides, she couldn’t deny the possibility of being devoured immediately if she challenged them.

In such a situation, Oumi Shuri answered,

“…I’m going.”

Due to the thorough modification of her physical body, the 10-year-old-like girl was the elite who had the role of the ‘Pioneer’. Those eyes showed the light of her existence that would not be extinguished no matter what damage happened to her body.

“I must get the cornerstone that will revitalize the Kouga. It doesn’t matter even if the Natural Selector can’t continue. If I must be eliminated by someone, my fate shall contribute by letting someone else fall into such a threat in the future. I must go no matter what.”

Kumokawa Maria sighed.

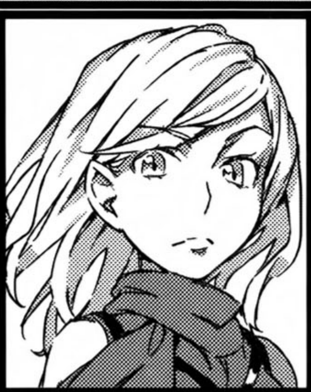
She shook her head from side to side.

Then…

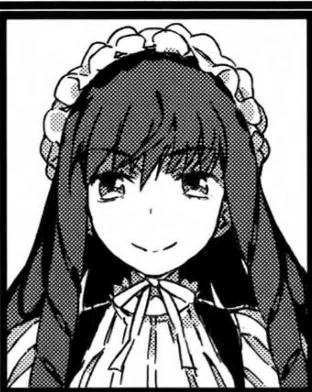
“It can’t be helped then. I’ll hurt your pride to protect your life.”

There was no more time for any doubts.

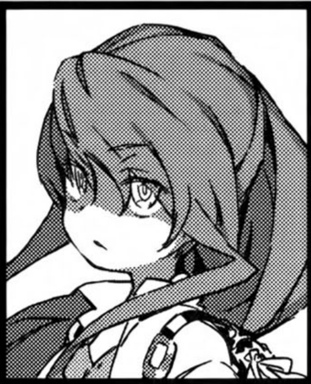
Immediately after, Kumokawa Maria landed on 4 limbs and leaped over in a puzzling manner. Oumi Shuri lost consciousness.



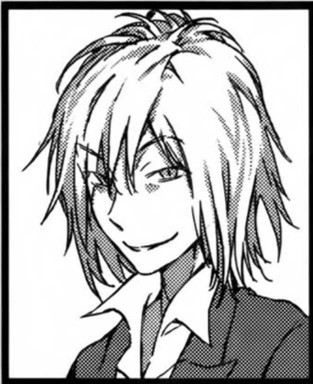
Natural Selector competitor
Saflee Opendays



Academy City's maid girl
Kumokawa Maria



Natural Selector competitor
Oumi Shuri



GREMLIN's official member
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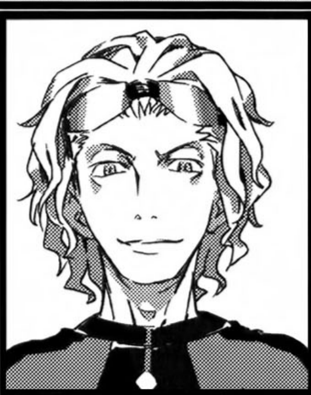


Kihara family
Kihara Ransuu

CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

MAIN.11

"Fuuuck fuuuck fuckiiing fuuuck," sang a girl as she scattered fresh red blood about Baggage City.

She was in Baggage City's garbage disposal facility. The hot water pipes and passageways connected there as well. In fact, the heat produced by burning the garbage was used to run the hot water heating facility, so it could even be called the core of Baggage City.

A few different facilities such as the thermal power station and the oil refinement plant functioned as the cornerstones that kept the hot water heating facility running, so if all of them were to be knocked out, Baggage City would be sent to a hell of below -20 degree temperatures.

The battlefield had distorted like an amoeba.

It had gone from being a safely maintained circular ring to a garbage disposal facility where human life was viewed as holding no value.

From how her attacks were mass producing the color red, it may have been hard to tell that the girl was actually on the side of the defenders.

Her silver hair was braided.

She had brown skin and wore glasses with red frames.

As she was wearing overalls over her bare skin, her outfit was a bit odd for walking around town or for heading through a snow-covered area. She held a hammer and a saw made of gold. Normally, pure gold was resistant to corrosion and oxidation but had low solidity. In other words, it was too soft a metal to use as a blade. However, that standard knowledge meant nothing to that brown girl. Her gold tools could cut steel, break concrete, and "alter" humans in psychedelic ways.

She was a formal member of Gremlin.

She was a living Dvergr.

She was Marian Slingeneyer.

She was not actually moving very fast. In fact, she was moving quite slowly. Her speed was no quicker than a normal girl wasting time on the way back home.

However…

“Woof, woof. Growl,” muttered Marian as she stabbed her gold saw at the wall.

For some reason it stuck. As soon as she let go of it, the saw shot toward the enemy line at the speed of an automobile. The Academy City assassins had assumed her range was only that of the saw, and they could do nothing but stand still in shock at the sudden change in her reach.

Blood sprayed in to the air.

“Gah!?”

“Gyaaahh!!”

“Grease! Did she cover the wall in grease so the saw would slide on it!?”

“Too slow.”

The gold saw left the wall and arced complicatedly through the air, chopping the multiple soldiers to pieces as they stood in place.

But immediately afterwards, their bodies were whole once more. None of them had bled a drop of blood this time.

“What…?”

“Hmm? You should take a good look at your arms and legs.” Marian grabbed the saw that had returned to her via the wall, spun it around a few times, and then pointed at the soldiers with its deadly tip. “Doesn’t it look like they’ve been forcibly stuck together? It’s like pieces from multiple jigsaw puzzles have been mixed together.”

“No…way…”

“Oh, and I never performed any compatibility tests, so if you don’t hurry, a transplant rejection is probably going to start. If you don’t want to die, you’ll need to get your own parts back.”

“Oooooooooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

It was unclear if they really intended to attack their fellow soldiers, but those around them reacted.

The unharmed soldiers who had been swallowed up by the bizarre atmosphere decided the others were going to attack, so they treated them like enemies and shot them.

“What a tragedy,” muttered Marian Slingeneyer quietly.

In the time their attention had been drawn away due to fear, she had approached much closer to the surviving soldiers.

That was when an assassin hiding among the collapsed bodies shot at her at close range with a handgun.

However, Marian swung her golden saw without even looking over.

Immediately afterwards, both the assassin’s hands disappeared.

They had not been severed.

Instead, everything beyond his two wrists had been turned into a single golden faucet. This put him in a similar situation to having his hands cuffed and the components making it up were nothing more than his normal arms and a normal faucet. However, the scene they created together was simply too grotesque.

Human modification.

Her Dvergr techniques went beyond the realm of surgery and actually functioned as combat techniques.

“A-ah…”

As the assassin stared blankly at his changed hands, Marian Slingeneyer patted him on the shoulder.

“Good try.” She grinned. “But accomplishing nothing still gets you 0 points. Too bad.”

Without hesitation, she turned on the faucet.

With the sound of flowing liquid, the dark red liquid that gave him life easily poured out.

“Oooooooooooooooooooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

“With both your hands turned into a single faucet, you can’t even turn it off. Now, how much blood loss is lethal to humans again? Well, I’m sure a bucketful is enough…hm? He’s already unconscious?”

The assassin convulsed as he sank into the pool of his own blood.

Showing no concern, Marian Slingeneyer continued to walk forward.

“I’m really not the combat type, so I thought this would be harder. I’m quite disappointed in Baggage City—that is, the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians—for being so utterly defeated by nothing more than this. They might not even buy us the time we needed.”

With that annoyed comment, Marian pointed the end of the gold saw toward her feet. Before an assassin hiding behind cover could fire his rifle at her, she tore through the throat of a soldier who was collapsed on the ground and was just barely breathing.

When she did, a loud child-like soprano scream that seemed to exceed the limits of the human vocal cords erupted out.

A young scream. The frequency that humans found the most irritating.

While the assassin behind cover’s body froze in response to that sudden explosion of noise, Marian Slingeneyer approached him head on with long strides.

She swung her gold hammer like a baseball bat.

“Daruma Otoshi!!”

The assassin’s entire abdomen was blown away. The blunt mass of flesh shot out like a shell and crushed another assassin located a distance away.

“B-bgh…”

“You’re still not dead?” Marian scratched at her head. “If you had just died here, you could have gone to your grave without getting too messed up.”

With long strides, Marian approached the assassin who had been hit by the abdomen of his fellow assassin that had been removed like he was a toy. Giving up on his dropped rifle, he tried to pull out his handgun while collapsed on the ground, but she crushed his arm underfoot and took out both his legs with one blow of the saw.

His two legs became two wheels.

The assassin screamed at the disgusting yet painless change.

“You have a straight path to the compost tank. Have fun suffocating in the rotting trash ☆,” Marian whispered as if to a lover.

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

It was too late for him to even try grabbing at the floor with his fingernails. Still collapsed, the assassin was dragged along the ground at high speed, disappearing down a passageway. The scene was similar to a victim being swallowed up into the sea in a horror movie featuring a giant shark.

“Is this all you’ve got?”

Marian Slingeneyer spun around her golden weapons.

She suddenly realized the great noise had vanished. Silence surrounded her. It was not that all of the assassins had been defeated. Only about a third or a fourth of them had been killed. However, the corpses and transformed piles of flesh she had created were enough to cause those unharmed to drop their weapons and fall to the floor.

That was a fate worse than death.

That hackneyed term was often used in movies and novels, but it had a way of destroying all thoughts in one’s mind when it was actually seen.

People were meant to wish for life and fear death. When that basis of thought was no longer functioning, all other thought patterns were cut off as well.

“Is that all the great Academy City can do? Then I’m a bit disappointed. I thought you guys were the winners of World War III?”

All of them held their breath and desperately tried to hide the fact that their heart was still beating. The slight sound of breathing that still escaped their mouths caused Marian to frown. She would use her gold saw and hammer to kill some and transform others into some inhuman form. The remaining assassins could no longer move. Their hearts had been utterly defeated. They did not even have the courage to flee. Or more specifically, they did not have the courage to take any action that would draw her attention.

However, Marian Slingeneyer did not hesitate.

If they resisted, she chased them down and killed them. If they did not, she chopped them down like weeds.

“Sigh. It’s so much easier when I can get them to take each other out. Like this, I actually have to fight. This is why I don’t like combat. Hmm, I’m a bit worried about my diet.”

Marian stuck a hand inside her overalls and rubbed her stomach while using the other hand to swing about the gold saw. By accurately targeting the internal organs and immediately sealing the external wounds afterwards, she killed them such that they filled up like water balloons due to internal bleeding and did not dirty the area.

Just as Marian was satisfied with the absolute silence in the area, she heard the sound of creaking metal.

“?”

“Oh, dear. I don’t recognize—Oh, dear. Oh, dear. Where am I?”

A woman wearing pajamas was there. From the fact that she was in a wheelchair, she must not have had full use of her legs. She had a wired button sitting on her lap. She may have been a patient from a Baggage City hospital who had taken the chaos of the Academy City attack as an opportunity to get outside the hospital.

Her expression was very gentle.

She had likely not yet seen the “things” Marian had created.

“Who are you?” asked Marian.

“Oh, are you…umm, is that the uniform of a garbage disposal facility worker?”

“The furnace I use is a bit different. It does get to some high temperatures, though.” Marian scratched at her head with the hand holding the grip of her gold saw. “If you want the exit, take a right there and you’ll find the door 200 meters down the passageway. You should be quick about it. This is a pretty dirty place.”

It may have been hard to imagine from the gruesome things she had been doing, but as stated before, Marian was one of the people protecting Baggage City. For the moment at least. As such, she had no real reason to modify the people of Baggage City.

The woman in the wheelchair bowed her head forward and said, “Thank you very much. …Oh? I’m caught on this cable on the floor. It’s just too high…Oh, dear.”

“Oh, god. What a pain.”

Marian Slingeneyer casually approached the pajama-wearing woman and circled around behind her wheelchair. She grabbed the handle and leaned her weight on it to raise the wheels over the thick cable.

“Ngh. This is a heavy wheelchair. Is it electric?”

“Electric assisted, yes. If I don’t exert myself some, my body will just get weaker and weaker, so it’s set so I don’t have it too easy. See, this box is the controller.”

“Yeah, I get it. I’m the indoor type, too. I do have to swing a hammer for my job though, so I do have a bit of upper body strength.”

“Are you a carpenter?”

“Not quite. I have no interest in building a castle. By the way,” Marian said as she pushed the wheelchair. “Is it hard getting around in a wheelchair?”

"It can be, yes. But it does give you plenty of opportunities to meet kind people. Like this for instance."

"I see. *But with how many cables and unlevel areas there are in this garbage disposal facility, how did you get this far in a wheelchair*?"

"...Oh, dear."

"It doesn't make any sense. It seems to me you purposefully got yourself stuck on that cable in order to draw me in close."

"..."

Marian's eyes narrowed and she tightened her grip on the gold saw.

Meanwhile, the pajama-wearing woman was still grinning.

Suddenly, the sound of metal clashing with metal rang out.

Marian Slingeneyer had simply swung the gold saw straight down.

What the pajama-wearing woman had done was unclear.

The handle of the wheelchair had suddenly jerked from Marian's grasp and the wheelchair had rotated 180 degrees. That much Marian understood. However, that was all she understood. Something had knocked away her saw, but even afterwards, she had no idea what it had been.

Marian Slingeneyer's body was knocked violently back and her back struck and crushed the equipment against the wall.

The woman's wheelchair had left smoking tire marks on the floor in the shape of a perfect circle. While sitting above that circle, she pressed a button on the wired box in her lap.

It was unclear how they fit inside or even if it was possible given the law of conservation of mass, but an arm-like light machine gun and a shotgun (or cannon?) with a caliber great enough to fit a human arm within emerged from the back of the wheelchair.

Both guns had the same thing written on the side using the alphabet.

Made_in_KIHARA.

"If you've figured it out, I guess there's no point in holding back!!"

The sound of the gunfire alone sounded loud enough to damage one's internal organs. A storm of steel flew through the air. In an instant, Marian Slingeneyer's silhouette was utterly destroyed as she lay sunk into the crushed machinery. Her upper body was turned into a thick red liquid. And her lower body was…

“What, is that kind of joke popular in Academy City?”

“?”

The voice had come from the remaining lower body. No. *Another* Marian Slingeneyer was crouching down at the feet of the crushed one.

However, that was not accurate either.

The pajama-wearing woman using the name Kihara quickly re-aimed her weapons.

“So that’s the real one!?”

“*That’s a decoy too, you idiot*,” said a voice from right next to her.

The pajama-wearing woman turned around and saw a third completely naked Marian Slingeneyer swinging down that gold saw that had *turned only the outer appearance of some defeated Academy City soldiers into a smooth girl.*

But once more, the wheelchair made a short, quick, blurring movement and some kind of equipment clashed with Marian’s saw, causing orange sparks to fly.

Tire marks were left on the floor and smoke from the friction rose up.

By Marian’s reckoning, the woman could probably fence and win while sitting in that wheelchair. Whether she could hold the sabre was another question.

(Tch. This is why I hate these freaks. And why I hate combat.)

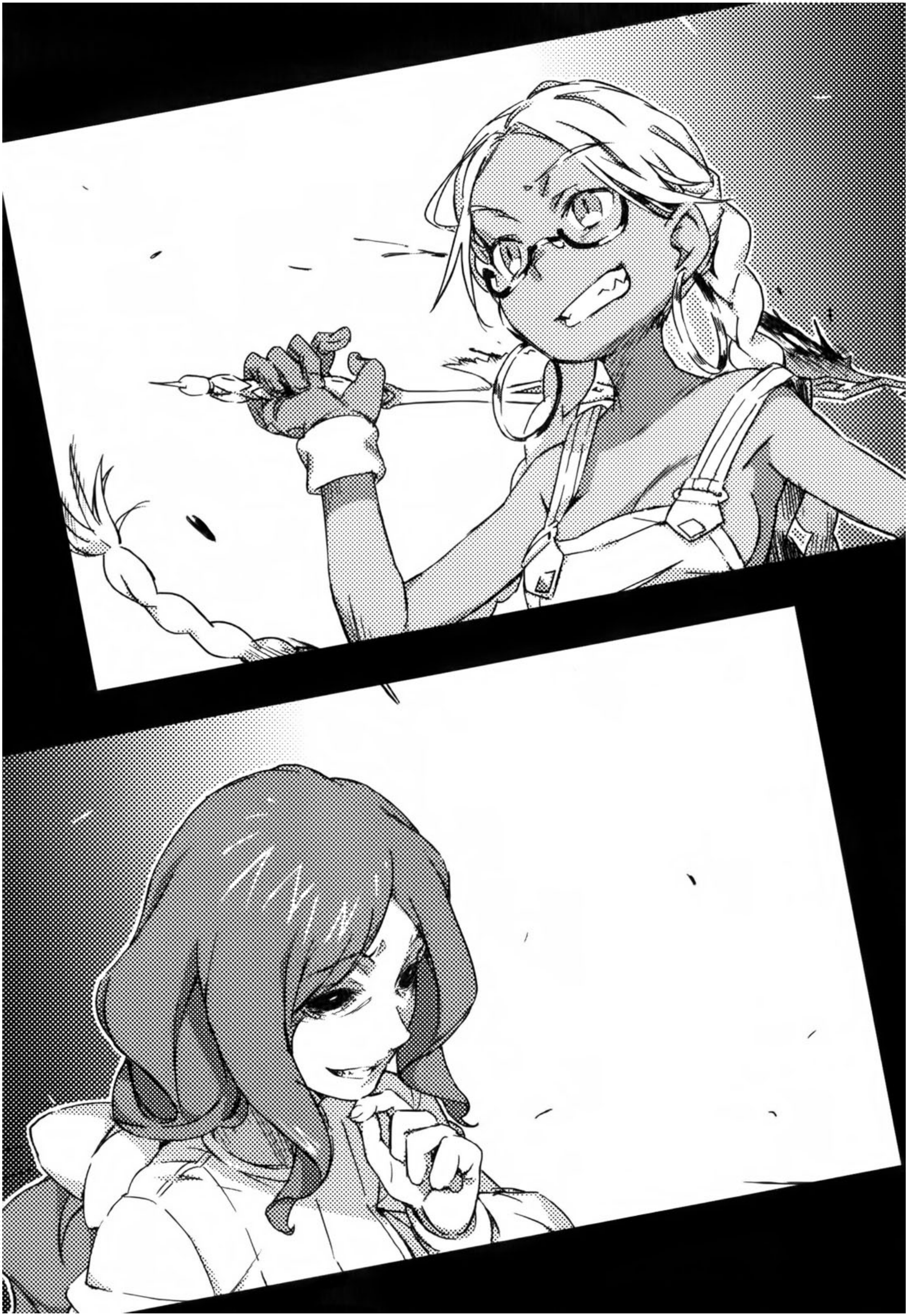
She must have left spares scattered about her territory because Marian pulled a new pair of overalls out from behind some equipment and put them on.

As the wheelchair moved back with a squeaking noise, it moved frighteningly smoothly as if the cables and other obstacles were not there at all.

The pajama-wearing woman was grinning as always.

“So you were faking it. You can handle yourself well enough even if you can’t stand up.”

“I, Kihara Byouri, am a pro at ‘giving up’. I have given up on all sorts of things myself and I have made others give up on all sorts of things. So give up, Gremlin.”



"…Ohhh, I see. That's quite a nice way to live."

"But is it really that surprising? I'd say there are very few people who have never once faked needing help. I'd say the desire to give up is one of the major desires of humanity."

Kihara Byouri's job was to preserve order in that way.

If a terrorist group planned to destroy Academy City, she would "make them give up". If someone was trying to leak information on Academy City tech, she would "make them give up". If someone was developing a new weapon of mass destruction in a negative way, she would "make them give up". Making people give up and give up and give up was how Kihara Byouri formed her trophy collection. She had a pile of ruined ambitions that had been twisted, broken, and crushed.

But then, this was nothing more than the result of taking her natural disposition and mixing it with society.

Kihara Byouri herself was one to "give up" on things.

Marian Slingeneyer clicked her tongue while staring at the wheelchair that was covered in lies.

"Kihara, was it? If I recall, there were more of you. But coming here like this will only lead to your defeat."

"I have given up on Ransuu-kun, but there's still Enshuu-chan."

"So there are at least three of you. And from the way you said that, I doubt there are hundreds or thousands of you here. In that case, I would think your methods would be a bit different."

"Your methods aren't much different."

"You invite in 5 or 10 combat obsessed idiots and *the entire plan falls apart from the inside*. What a pain," muttered Marian. "Well, I hope you don't mind if I do my best to crush you."

With a whoosh, Marian swung her saw.

The wall the saw blade dug into bled. No. It was a soldier that had been transformed to look just like the wall. He burst open like a balloon, and blood and fat splattered across the wall and floor. It was likely some kind of ritual for better using the gold tool.

Before, Marian had sent that saw racing across that wall that was now covered in fresh gore to attack the soldiers.

However, Kihara Byouri’s smile did not waver even upon seeing that grotesque scene.

“Is that your best? What a disappointment.”

Marian held up her gold hammer and saw, and Kihara Byouri pressed the button on her lap in response.

The wheelchair’s wheels disassembled.

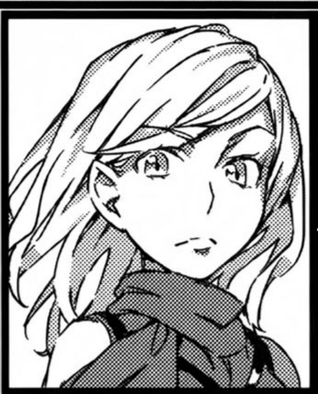
The multiple spokes split apart and the evenly-divided portions of wheels were brought to the ground. What remained was a unit supported by multiple legs like a spider.

She may have been impressed with the craftsmanship because Marian let out a whistle.

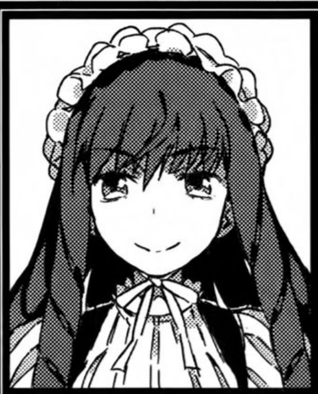
“Now that must have taken some doing. You remind me of ‘Lone Wolf and Cub’.”

“But it is a baby carriage.”

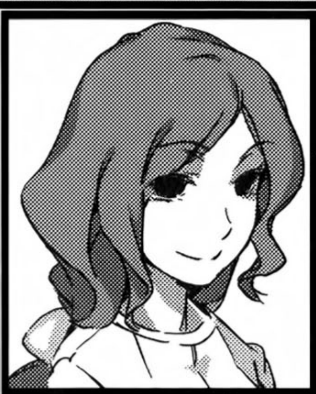
After that slight exchange, the two monsters clashed at top speed.



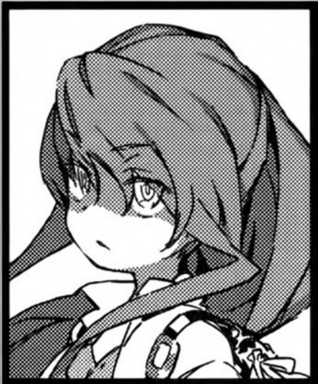
Natural Selector competitor
Saflee Opendays



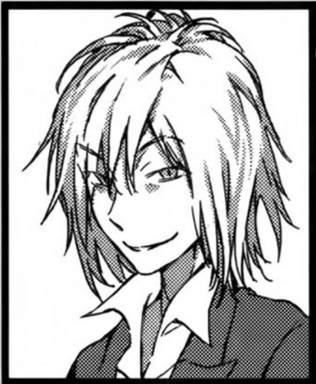
Academy City's maid girl
Kumokawa Maria



Kihara family
Kihara Byouri



Natural Selector competitor
Oumi Shuri



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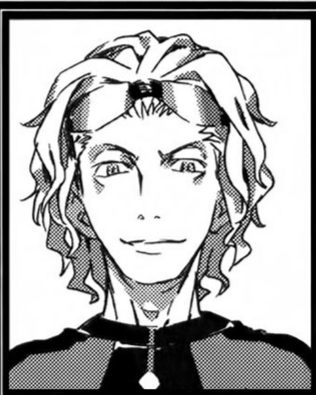
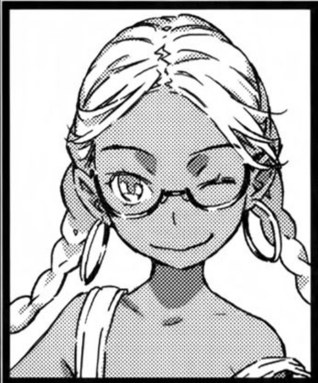


Kihara family
Kihara Ransuu



GREMLIN's official member
Marian Slingeneyer

CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

MAIN.12

Oumi Shuri let out a small groan. She could tell she was lying on the floor. The one who had knocked her out, Kumokawa Maria, was peering down at her face. She held a lemon slice in her hand. She must have used it to wake Oumi Shuri.

They were no longer at the passageway corner from before.

They were in a wide area filled with concentric circles of desks. The area was also filled with large monitors. It may have been a control room for the supply of hot water to Baggage City, but it was odd that they were the only two there.

Would it normally have been abandoned? Had the workers fled due to all the trouble? Or had they already been eliminated by the attackers?

Really, that did not matter.

The real issue was that she had been taken away from the fight between Kihara and Gremlin.

She had lost her once in a lifetime chance.

"!!"

As she sat up, Oumi Shuri tried to stick her gardening trowel-type kunai at Kumokawa Maria's throat, but Kumokawa easily held it back with both hands. She then performed a handstand with Oumi Shuri's kunai at the center, spread her legs wide, and rotated like a bamboo copter.

The weapon was ripped from Oumi Shuri's hand.

Kumokawa Maria brought her right leg to the ground and spun around her newly acquired blade.

"Like I said, you can't win. And if you can't handle something like this, you definitely shouldn't peer in any deeper. It won't just be your pride that gets hurt. Those with no experience with this kind of threat cannot react properly when faced with it. Or do you not even understand something of this lev-…"

Kumokawa Maria’s sentence was suddenly cut off.

The reason was simple.

Without warning, a bazooka had been fired into the room.

Kumokawa Maria immediately placed only her left foot on the ground and bent her body like a giant bridge. The bazooka shell pierced through the area her upper body had just been in, but when it struck the wall beyond and exploded, the shockwave it sent out was unavoidable.

“Geh…!?”

Kumokawa Maria lost her balance, was knocked over, and her balled up form rolled smoothly across the ground. By not fighting that flow, she had avoided any direct hits from the shell’s shrapnel or the pieces of the wall. As she rolled, she immediately tried to recover.

But instead, she felt a dull sensation.

At some point, a third party had entered the transmission control center. Kumokawa Maria had been stopped by that person’s foot.

(Not good. The bazooka was meant to draw our attention while this person quickly entered the room!)

The figure looking down at Kumokawa held up a giant tube. It was the bazooka that had fired the shell. The attacker was about to swing it down as a blunt weapon.

Kumokawa Maria had immediately taken action to avoid the bazooka shell when it had been fired, but now she felt something cold run down her back. Her movements slowly but surely stopped.

The instant afterwards, her consciousness was knocked away.

“…”

Oumi Shuri heard a heavy thud. Having no more use for it, the attacker tossed aside the blunt weapon. Despite how easily she had handled Oumi Shuri, Kumokawa Maria had been taken out in less than 10 seconds. Sensing what a great threat this attacker was, Oumi Shuri started counting the weapons she had hidden in her clothes. It was meant to help her retain her calm, but it had the opposite effect. No matter what she used, she doubted she could win.

Meanwhile, the attacker said, “Umm, I really don’t like this at all. It would be best if we could resolve this without fighting, but…”

The attacker was a short girl. She seemed to be around middle school age. Her black hair had buns on the left and right and she wore a large sweater, a miniskirt, and black stockings. The lack of unity to her outfit that made it look like she had just bought everything the clerk had recommended somehow matched her hesitant mood.

Her one other notable trait was what hung down from her neck. A cell phone, a small 1seg TV, and a handheld device. The precision devices with small screens clattered against each other as they hung down.

"*But as a Kihara I have no choice.*"

Oumi Shuri heard a slight electronic noise and all the countless monitors lining the transmission control center turned on at once. Displayed on them were countless graphs changing at high speed. At first glance the meaning of the graphs was unclear, but the attacker girl's pupils absorbed it all. The countless graphs danced like living things within her eyes.

"*I understand, Amata-ojichan. I don't like it. I really don't like it, but a Kihara would do it like this!!*"

Her actions clearly changed.

With quick, smooth movements, the attacker girl charged toward Oumi Shuri.

(!! What!? Did she get some kind of information from that!?)

Oumi Shuri stuck her index fingers in her socks and then quickly stood up, pulling something out of her socks. They were metal sheets with both ends pointed and that were only about the size of nail clippers. They were meant to be thrown, but they were different from bo-shuriken. She aimed for the floor rather than the attacker. A number of the pointed metal sheets stabbed into the wooden floor. They were stereotypical caltrops. She doubted the attacker would actually step on them, but it would slow the attacker down to avoid them. Oumi Shuri planned to finish off the attacker in that time, so she pulled out a new garden trowel-type kunai.

However, something Oumi Shuri did not expect happened.

Not only did the attacker girl not slow down, but she accurately kicked one of the caltrops, sending it flying straight for Oumi Shuri's face.

"!?"

Oumi Shuri immediately tried to protect her face with the kunai, but the attacker girl altered the trajectory of her foot and sent a second kick at the caltrop in midair.

The metal sheet's trajectory greatly changed and stabbed into Oumi Shuri's gut.

It was not some large knife, so it was not a fatal wound, but the pain still caused her body to freeze up. Meanwhile, the attacker girl precisely and accurately cleared the danger zone of caltrops and headed straight for Oumi Shuri.

"Yes, yes, I understand."

The writhing of the graphs on the monitors grew even more intense and the attacker girl's eyes absorbed some sort of information from them.

"*Controlling hammer-level destructive power on the microscopic level. That was your combat pattern, right, Amata-ojichan!?*"

(…Am I done for!?)

The girl's right fist flew toward her.

Oumi Shuri had held up her kunai defensively, but the girl struck her arm, sending the tip of the kunai straight for her face.

Her throat grew dry.

She could not stop the blade's movement.

She just barely managed to move her own kunai's trajectory toward her harder forehead to avoid a fatal blow.

And then a new right fist flew.

This fist did not belong to Oumi Shuri or the attacker girl.

It was from a complete third party.

The third party wore a white coat that reached down to his ankles and a white helmet that covered his entire face.

Neither of the other two were sure when he had approached.

The third party's *right fist* accurately knocked away Oumi Shuri's kunai, protecting her skull at the last second. The attacker girl changed her target. She let loose a precise and accurate punch toward the third party's face.

However, the sound of the blow was too quiet.

The helmeted man had determined he could not defend against her, so he had kicked at the girl's feet at the same time she had thrown the punch. Without her weight behind it, the girl's punch had only knocked the helmeted man's head back slightly.

The attacker girl went on the defensive and stepped back a bit.

"Kihara Enshuu, hm? I had heard you had not yet qualified as a Kihara," muttered the helmeted man.

"Who are you?"

"If you wish to harm these girls, I must make you my enemy."

"If you wish to save these girls, I must make you my enemy."

The graphs writhed within the girl's eyes.

"*I'd like some advice, Amata-ojichan.*" When she spoke, the pattern of the graphs clearly changed and the color changed with each new name she spoke. "*No. Ransuu-ojichan, Konshou-oneechan, Sokuryou-kun, Kaihou-obachan… No, no. Not that. Not that. Umm, umm… Yes, Yuiitsu-oneechan!!*"

"So you make up for the thoughts you lack by inputting them from scripts. Was your original specialty the Testaments? I have some doubts whether your personality can safely hold the patterns though."

"*Yes, yes, Yuiitsu-oneechan. A Kihara would do this at a time like this!!*"

A large change came over all the graphs in the room.

With the graphs reflected in her eyes, the short girl raised her middle finger and shouted.

"I'm gonna rattle all the carbon dioxide in your body and burst all the fucking blood vessels in your body!! …Now that was nice and Kihara-like!!"

"No."

As Kihara Enshuu charged forward in attack, the helmeted man calmly reached for the buttons of his coat.

Inside was…

"A convex shaped charge landmine!?"

"*This is what it means to be a Kihara.*"

He unhesitatingly detonated it.

A shaped charge landmine was a landmine created such that the blast went in a certain direction. If you wanted to punch a hole in the armor of a tank or other armored weapon, you could attach explosives to a crater-like concave sheet which would focus the explosive power in a single direction. If instead you wanted to spread the explosive blast over a wide area, you could attach the explosives to a mountain-like convex sheet which would spread the blast out in a fan shape. That kind was primarily used for anti-personnel mines that had to take out as many people at once as possible and they often had many small metal balls stuffed inside.

The helmeted man had held a convex shaped charge landmine under his coat.

Five hundred balls were scattered in a fan-shaped blast with a range of 300 meters and an overall width of 200 meters.

(Is he insane…!?)

The Kouga were knowledgeable in the use of explosives, so Oumi Shuri's breath caught in her throat.

Shaped charged were made so the destructive force was aimed in a certain direction. In other words, in the other direction, one would not be harmed by the explosive. However, everything had a limit. If you were *holding* the mine when it detonated, there was no way you would escape unscathed.

Or at least, that was the case in the world of common knowledge that had nothing to do with supernatural powers.

"…Damn, she got away," muttered the helmeted man.

The edges of his coat had been blown away. As if to explain his survival, a bent metal sheet fell from his chest, but that was of course nowhere near enough to protect him from a blast of that magnitude.

"I may have been too close. I guess I drew her in too much. At the base of the fan, the danger zone gets smaller to the left and right."

The helmeted man turned toward the unconscious Kumokawa Maria and then turned toward Oumi Shuri. She held up her kunai.

"Don't. You cannot defeat me with that."

"…"

"Oh, I wasn't looking down on you. *In fact, I'm saying that you have too much strength to kill me*."

His logic made no sense.

Or perhaps anyone who could not understand it had no right to be on that battlefield. Oumi Shuri had the same feeling as if she had asked a major leaguer the key to victory and he had responded, "Don't get nervous."

And yet getting rid of that was her goal.

"To be honest, I gain nothing by fighting you two. I specialize in Kiharas."

(First we have these Kiharas, then whatever Gremlin is, and now a Kihara specialist? How many different forces are present here in Baggage City?)

As Oumi Shuri's eyes grew more and more hostile, the helmeted man merely said, "Since I do not need to fight you, I will tell you what you must do to survive. First and foremost, *you must find Kamijou Touma*."

"…?"

"He is here in Baggage City. Given the situation, he is likely being sent all over the place. Meeting Kamijou Touma is directly linked to your survival. To be blunt, if you do not meet him, you will die." The helmeted man said this almost too readily. "Kihara Enshuu only attacked you for the *decidedly un-Kihara-like concern* she felt about uncertain elements like you being near Kihara Byouri. However, now that the Kiharas have seen as you as playing a role in this, it will be difficult for you to survive by normal means. That is why you must meet up with someone on the level of Kamijou Touma."'

"Who is Kamijou Touma?"

"Just a normal boy. He cannot solve any and all problems and I doubt he can stop Baggage City from being destroyed by the Kiharas and Gremlin. But on the other hand, he has a way of saving each and every person he sets his eyes on. Just like the Kiharas destroy each and every person they set their eyes on. You need to use someone of his level in order to escape the Kiharas. Normally, Accelerator would be best for an anti-Kihara battle, but he isn't here. As such, we have to use someone else."

The helmeted man crouched down next to the unconscious Kumokawa Maria and checked her pulse and breathing. After ensuring there were no major problems, he turned back to Oumi Shuri.

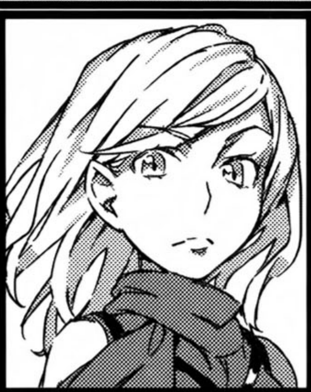
"When this girl wakes up, tell her you will almost certainly die if you do not do as I suggested."

“What are you going to do?”

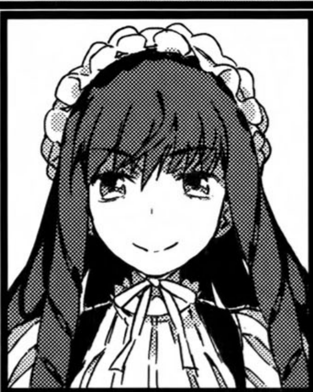
“Sorry, but I have my own objective. As I said, I specialize in Kiharas. Also, I am not confident I would be able to protect you two,” answered the helmeted man as he headed for the exit with his battered coat dragging along.

His last words were spoken softly but in a tone that stuck with Oumi Shuri.

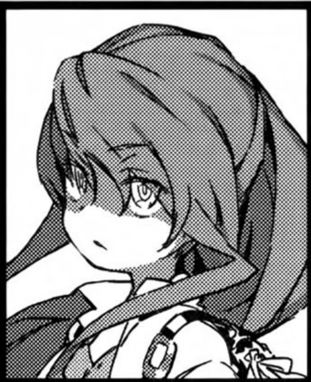
“After all, I am a Kihara myself.”



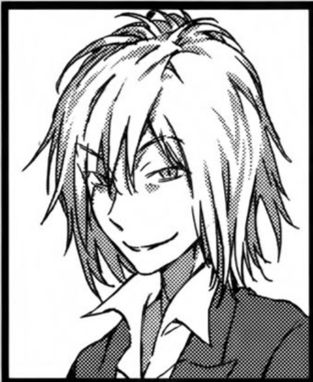
Natural Selector competitor
Saflee Opendays



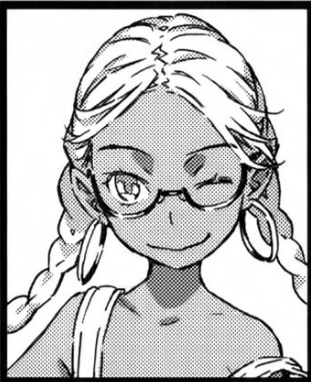
Academy City’s maid girl
Kumokawa Maria



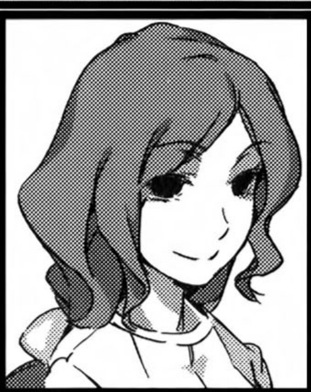
Natural Selector competitor
Oumi Shuri



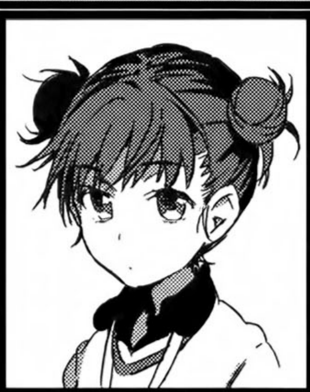
GREMLIN’s official member
Útgarða-Loki



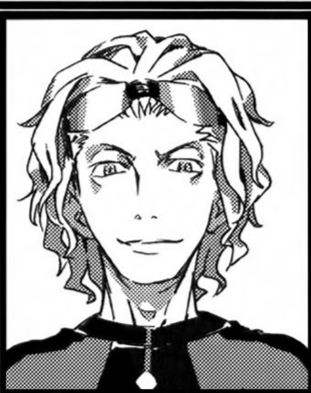
GREMLIN’s official member
Marian Slingeneyer



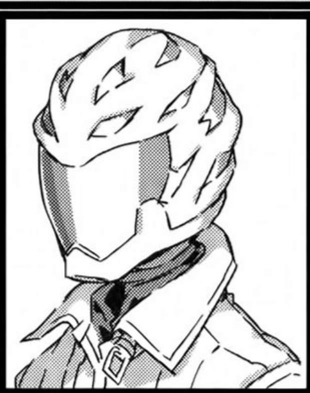
Kihara family
Kihara Byouri



Kihara family
Kihara Enshuu



Kihara family
Kihara Ransuu



Helmeted Man

CONFIDENTIAL
DOCUMENTS

SUB.13

Kumokawa Maria awoke with a small groan.

After Oumi Shuri explained the situation to her, she clicked her tongue in annoyance.

“Do you know him?”

“He’s Kihara Kagun, the person I’m after. But this isn’t enough for me to give in. In fact, I’ve made progress now that I know he’s here. The reports were accurate.”

“I don’t know what your situation is, but we need to get moving, too. That bazooka girl is still alive and nothing says she won’t return to finish us off.”

“One thing first.”

Kumokawa Maria stood up and started patting around her showy maid uniform. She also twisted her body around in what looked like an attempt to look at her back, but Oumi Shuri could see nothing there.

“What are you doing?”

“Checking for bugs or transmitters. Who knows what he could have done while I was unconscious. If Kihara Kagun knows where I am and what we are saying, he can keep eluding me even if we are in the same field.”

“It doesn’t look to me like there are any chips on your clothes.”

“It may not be something large enough to see. If he used a nanodevice, it could have even entered a stitch in the fibers. ...Damn,” muttered Kumokawa Maria. “I just can’t tell like this. I guess I’ll have to take the clothes off and run a hot blowdryer over them. That should destroy the inner workings of any unseen devices.”

“Can’t you check for the presence of an electromagnetic signal to see if there are any bugs or transmitters? A radio should be enough to detect it.”

“Do you know how an ant informs his comrades of a large piece of food so they can create that long procession?” asked Kumokawa Maria offhandedly. “Pheromones. A scent. The transmission does not need to be electromagnetic. If chemicals are used, electric circuits are not even needed. Academy City has a lot of people that use electricity or magnetism, so the development of devices that get around that has developed pretty far.”

“And what will heating it with a blowdryer do?”

“It will destroy the Data Pheromone system. It’s something like running a blowdryer over wet paint. The paint itself will remain, but the coloration will become something warped and different from what it would be if it dried naturally. The data within will be destroyed. The method is resistant to the cold, though.”

And so they left the control room, walked down the passageway, and checked inside a few doors as they went. They eventually found a staff locker room where they found a blowdryer.

Without hesitation, Kumokawa Maria stripped off her showy maid uniform and spread it out on the floor. She got down on all fours and started using the blowdryer on it.

The area was heated but it must have still been rather cold in nothing but her underwear because Kumokawa Maria rubbed her inner thighs together.

“This uses synthetic fibers, so I’m a bit worried it’s going to end up like a plastic bag.”

“How long will this take?”

“To do it thoroughly is going to take 10 or 20 minutes. What about you?”

“You don’t need to worry about me,” replied Oumi Shuri. “The ninja frequently use drugs in combat and intelligence. We have a reagent that can detect this kind of thing. If something was added somewhere on my clothes, a different color would appear in that spot.”

“So it’s like an improved version of the lab coat?”

“Something like that. If any of the microscopic devices you were talking about were actually slipped onto my clothes, they were probably destroyed by the weak acid used for the reagent.”

They continued to speak until Kumokawa Maria had finished heating the entirety of her maid uniform with the blowdryer. She then tried to put it on, but…

“Hot!! This is as hot as the Comedy Hot Bath!!”

“That tells me nothing about how hot it is.”

“It’s from the Ichihanaransai. That’s Academy City’s cultural festival which can get pretty exciting. Damn, it feels even hotter because I got so cold in just my underwear!!”

With tears in her eyes and while practically shouting, Kumokawa Maria somehow managed to get the showy maid uniform on.

SUB.14

Kihara Byouri was tilted to the side.

The multiple legs created from the wheelchair's wheels had been bent from powerful blows and were no longer functioning properly. A few guns and wires were sticking out of the back, but none of them looked functioning either.

Her opponent had simply been too much.

Marian Slingeneyer, a Gremlin magician, had completely controlled the battlefield with her gold saw and hammer. She had cornered Kihara Byouri in the garbage disposal facility's burnable garbage area. The area contained what looked like a large pool made of steel that was used to temporarily hold the garbage to be incinerated.

Wood, paper, and even bones too large for compost were dried out and then all burned together. The horrible smell stabbed at their noses. The extent of what qualified as burnable garbage was expanded due to the snowy Baggage City wishing for heat.

Kihara Byouri was stopped at the edge of that steel pool and Marian Slingeneyer was spinning her hammer around in her hand.

"Looks like this is the limit. I still have to deal with the other Kiharas, so I'll just be modifying you into something useful as quickly as possible."

"Oh, dear. I really do seem to be out of options, don't I?"

"Don't worry though. My modifications will actually be an improvement. Since you're in that wheelchair, how about I give you 8 or 10 legs? Hell, I could even make them rotate like a helicopter rotor."

"I would like to make one thing clear. I see no reason why I need to surrender just yet."

"Yes, you probably do have some weapons left, but look at your wheelchair. It's broken. How are you supposed to fight if you can't move around?"

"I can always do this."

With a dull clicking noise, the Kihara Byouri's pajama pants ripped open. Instead of the soft bare legs of a woman, a plastic machine spreading from the back of her knees and covering the entirety of her legs was below. It looked less like armor and more like ribbons wrapped around her legs.

With the sound of a motor coming from the back of her knees, Kihara Byouri smoothly stood up.

Marian clicked her tongue and said, "So even not being able to walk was a lie."

"I've already given up on so much, so I really wanted to avoid having to stand up on my own."

"Are those powered casts for hospital patients? Didn't a car company make those? I think it used the technology from a dancing robot. I saw it in a commercial."

"That was merely what could be created with the technology outside of Academy City. In fact, it would probably be a bad idea to give a hospital patient something with the strength to kick a tiger to death." With a painful noise, Kihara Byouri pulled a machete-like blade from the back of the wheelchair. "But you have gone through most of your 'weapons' in order to corner me. In fact, you're out of ammo. You have no more people to alter in order carry out your tricky strategies. Even that saw sliding technique seemed to require fat and oils that were quite fresh from a human body. For that reason, it does not seem you will be that much of a threat anymore, so how about you give up?"

Marian Slingeneyer looked down at the saw and hammer she held and then sighed.

All she had were tools. They were not weapons. They could of course be used to kill and do other horrible things, but their full ability could not be used in that way.

The flesh-colored remains scattered about had been too far destroyed from their base form to be turned into anything else.

Also, Marian's territory as a Dvergr was living bodies.

Manipulating the dead was the territory of the gods or the giants.

She could only use the blood and fat that left the human body for the dozen or so seconds until they "died".

"This *is* a problem. I doubt I can win in a fistfight. Also, aren't you going a bit far with the transformations?"

"It's a part of Japanese culture. Also, those who are hated must put in more effort and skill than those who are popular to survive this far. Humans grow the most when they stand up to difficulties."

"It is a shame how people hate the strongest and most skilled."

"It really is. Thanks to that, I have given up on so many things. But I have also made others give up on just as many things, so I do not especially hold it against the world."

Kihara Byouri took a step and then another.

She approached. Stepping on the flesh-colored remains scattered across the floor, Marian Slingeneyer took a few steps back, but she would never escape. With the machine assistance, it would not be difficult for Kihara Byouri to charge forward at speeds greater than a lion or tiger if she tried.

"How about you give up?"

"No, not yet."

"Then you hope to resist to the very end? I will crush that hope with everything I have, so give up."

"Then I'll take you up on that offer."

Marian Slingeneyer used her heel to kick up something lying at her feet. Similar to a fairly tricky way of juggling a soccer ball, the small device arced over her head from the back and she caught it in one hand.

The device had been held by one of the flesh-colored objects on the floor.

It was a radio used by the dark side combat unit the Kiharas had control of.

"Ahh, ahh. A target member of Gremlin is cornered down here in the underground garbage disposal facility. Requesting immediate concentrated fire from any nearby units."

She purposefully called in the enemy.

However, Marian Slingeneyer did not even view them as enemies. At their low level, they were no more than materials for her weapons.

Kihara Byouri's cheek twitched a bit.

"…Now you've done it."

"Now, how many of your excellent subordinates will come running? And the better they are, the sooner they'll get here." Marian tossed aside the radio and adjusted her grip on the gold hammer and saw. "Also, these soldiers are under the command of such a scary boss. If they screw up, they probably get harshly punished. After being trained under such frightening circumstances, they will probably rush here as quickly as they can."

"…"

With the machete-like blade in hand, Kihara Byouri charged full speed toward Marian Slingeneyer.

But the quick arrival of her well-trained subordinates worked against her.

Kihara Byouri's blade only made it within 3 cm of Marian Slingeneyer's throat.

The Dvergr had swung her gold axe and the soldier who had the misfortune to arrive first had his right arm grow to over twice its normal size. On Marian's command, he grabbed a fire extinguisher like a one-time-use pitching machine, wound up his arm enough to damage his body, and "fired" it with enough force to further injure himself.

With a dull noise, Kihara Byouri's body flew through the air and landed in the middle of the garbage disposal pool.

◆

"Hoo, now they're all dead," muttered Marian Slingeneyer as she returned her gold tools into her overalls.

With all the enemies in the area gone, she finally started feeling the damage signals—that is, pain—being sent from throughout her body. She staggered and brought a hand to the wall. While she continued to support herself on the wall, she slowly walked down the passageway.

Her primary objective had been to protect the heating facilities, so she did not leave the garbage disposal facility. Surprisingly, the living spaces for workers were not all that bad. She had remodeled one of those rooms into a hotel for herself.

It had originally been protected by a magical barrier, but the attack by the Kiharas and Academy City had caused a lot of damage to the construction of the building itself. The arrangement of the "signals" had been forcibly thrown out of order and the barrier had ceased to function.

"I guess when the ground below the building is being shaken, the building itself isn't going to escape unscathed."

It seemed the situation was not going to improve if she simply did what the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians told her to. The scale of their ideas was simply too small. In that way, they had lost to Academy City from the very beginning.

And so she decided to take matters into her own hands.

For that reason, she did not need to worry about a small barrier that only covered a single room.

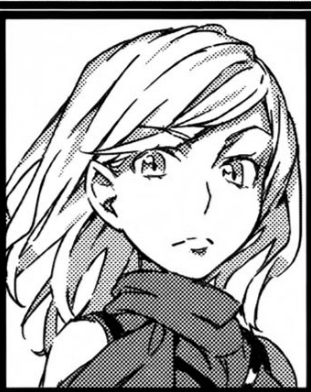
She had to acquire some higher level tools.

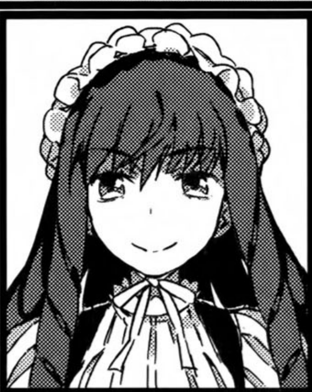
“Now where was it…? Ah, here we go.”

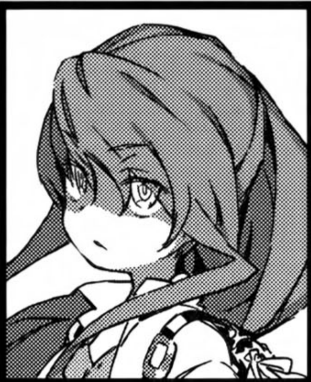
She opened the lid of a wooden box in the corner of the room and started to stick her hand inside but then stopped. She pulled a giant pair of pliers-like tongs out of her overalls and used them to grab the spiritual item.

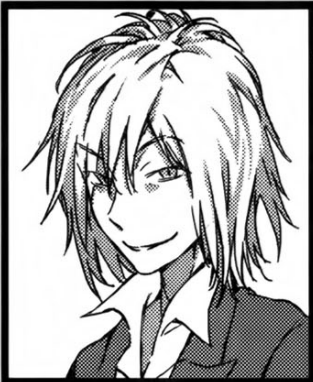
The edge of the wooden box was severed from the side she pulled it out from.

“I’d rather they did not shake things up any more, so I think it’s time I gave a counterattack.”


Natural Selector competitor
Saflee Opendays


Academy City's maid girl
Kumokawa Maria


Natural Selector competitor
Oumi Shuri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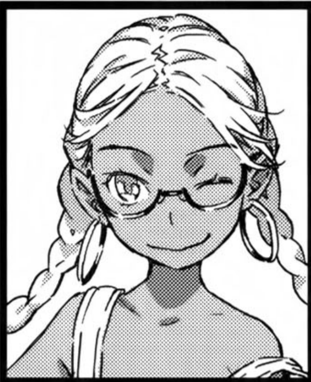
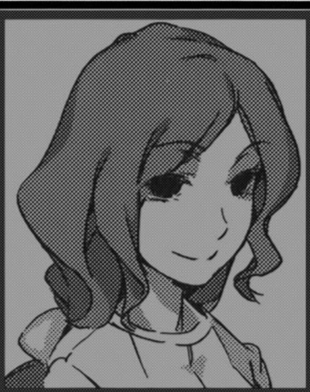
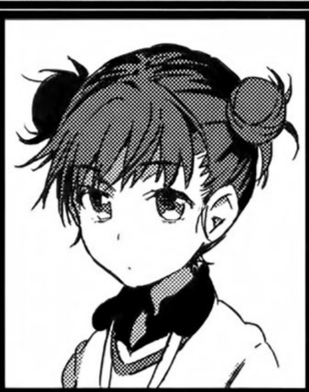
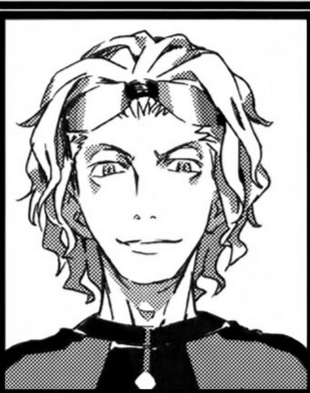
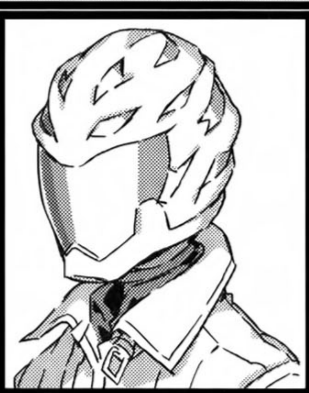

GREMLIN's official member
Marian Slingeneyer


Kihara family
Kihara Byouri


Kihara family
Kihara Enshuu


Kihara family
Kihara Ransuu


Helmeted Man

CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

SUB.15

Having determined any possible bugs or transmitters would have been safely destroyed by the heat of the blowdryer, Kumokawa Maria and Oumi Shuri began moving again.

They left the staff locker room and walked down the long underground passageway.

“Is there any specific path of escape? Is nowhere safe?”

“My objective is Academy City technology and yours is that Kihara Kagun who previously contacted us. In that case, *there is no real reason for us stay here in Baggage City while it is this dangerous*.”

Kumokawa Maria and Oumi Shuri peered around a corner.

They could both tell the area they were in required more caution than a shopping mall filled with zombies.

Or so they thought.

“There’s no one here,” said Oumi Shuri in a low voice.

Kumokawa agreed, and said, “But doesn’t that make it even creepier?”

They saw no one living or dead. And yet plenty of military helmets, bulletproof jackets, and assault rifles were scattered about the floor. It was unclear where their owners had gone or if those owners were even still alive.

“That would be either Academy City or the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians.”

“Either one would be dangerous.”

From Oumi’s perspective, both of them had strange technology. The odd situation wore on her nerves.

“But why would they remove all the bodies and bloodstains?”

"That's a good question. Neither of them are the type to soak up the last bit of soup with their bread."

◆

"Hmm hm hm hmm."

The humming of a girl reverberated through the area.

No one was there. The cute bell-like voice sounded out of place in the eerie area that was strongly reminiscent of death.

◆

Kumokawa Maria and Oumi Shuri slowly entered from around the corner.

The ninja whose height was no greater than an elementary school student pointed toward one of the assault rifles on the floor with a small finger.

"Which side uses this equipment?"

"Probably Academy City, so the attackers. I can tell from the technology used."

"I thought the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians used cutting edge weapons Academy City had loaned them?"

"Do you have any idea how fast Academy City gets a new 'cutting edge'?"

Kumokawa Maria reached to pick up the assault rifle, but Oumi Shuri grabbed the maid's arm to stop her.

"I think I know the point of this."

◆

"Hmm hm hm hmm hm hm."

The humming grew closer. Or rather, the girl producing it was growing closer. She was of course the one that had created the mysterious situation of Academy City military equipment being scattered about the floor.

Her goal was simple.

She created a mysterious situation.

Then she waited for that mysterious situation to draw someone out.

In other words, it was a trap.

If countless bodies were lying around and pools of blood were scattered about, no one would draw near. They would sense the danger and head in the opposite direction.

But what if only the cutting edge equipment was left?

It would seem strange, but not enough to immediately decide to run away. Also, humans had a tendency to give into their curiosity and investigate things they could not understand.

Also, the equipment was made up of things like bulletproof jackets and assault rifles.

In such a dangerous situation, even the most virtuous person would see no harm in possessing something like that.

♦

Oumi Shuri approached one of the bulletproof jackets, crouched down, circled around it, and sighed.

“I thought it looked oddly puffed up and it indeed has a grenade hidden under it. The pin has been pulled and the weight of the jacket is holding the lever down. If you pick it up, it goes boom.”

“How can you tell?”

“Don’t just look at the scene. Look at the intention of the person who created the scene.”

In that case, the other equipment was likely booby-trapped as well. Even if it wasn’t obvious from the outside, the rifles could easily have had something done to them on the inside.

Kumokawa Maria put her hands on her hips and shook her head.

“So I guess we should get out of here then. …Wait, what are you doing?”

“This is Academy City technology. It may have nothing to do with supernatural powers, but it’s still worth picking up.”

"…I thought you had decided it was a trap?"

"Even a trap can function as a resource. When you're running low on ammo in the battlefield, searching for landmines or wired grenades is one convenient method of finding some more."

"Is being a ninja these days like playing an FPS?"

It seemed the elementary school-size Oumi Shuri truly intended to disarm the trap. Kumokawa Maria nervously moved her hands around, but she did not dare actually stop Oumi Shuri for fear of causing her to make a mistake.

"To me, this seems like a case where getting greedy will lead to an unfortunate ending."

"This isn't a Hollywood movie. Bombs that complex are not used in actual combat. The rule of thumb for all kinds of weapons is 'easily set up and easily taken apart'. As long as the lever of the grenade is held down, it's safe. If you stick in a straightened paper clip or something in place of the pin, the trap will be neutralized."

"What's the range of a grenade?"

"There are various kinds of anti-personnel fragmentation grenades, but most of them have a range greater than 10 meters."

"I'll be honest with you. I really wanna run away!"

"Don't push me. No sneezing either. The process is simple, but the result of failure is simple too. If you try to pull any kind of ill-advised gags right now, this will have a real life explosion ending."

◆

"Hmm hm hm. Hm hm hmm."

◆

"Stay still."

"Hey, umm…"

"What?"

"Could you sit on the floor rather than bending over like that? Your panties are on full display over here."

"If you care, then hold my skirt down yourself!!"

◆

"Hm hmm!"

◆

"Stay still. I said still!!"

"I think you're trembling even more than I am. Why did you start trembling the instant you sat down anyway?"

"The floor was colder than I had expected. Also, I really have to use the bathroom!"

"I'm pretty sure you're holding down the lever of a grenade, though!"

"Shut up! Anyway, you just hold still. If you don't, this thing will blow both of us away!!"

◆

"Hm hm hm hm hmm!!"

◆

And then something problematic occurred.

◆

"Hm hm…huh?"

When she arrived at the scene humming and skipping, Kihara Enshuu looked confused.

No one was in the trapped passageway.

In fact, there was no sign anyone had touched any of the traps.

Just to make sure, she checked with an ultraviolet light, but she saw no footprints on the floor.

"Still too soon," said Kihara Enshuu with a troubled look on her face. "Well, I set up these roach traps in 20 places, so maybe I caught something in one of the others."

◆

Meanwhile, Oumi Shuri cast aside the bulletproof jacket she had acquired.

“The fibers and plate within have been melted! This thing’s useless!! It’s not even worth analyzing!!”

“Exploding packets of paint are still used today to prevent shoplifting for a reason. And there is no real reason the contents have to be paint. I have heard of chemicals being developed that are harmless to humans but will melt right through the wall of an airplane. Something like that may have been running through the plate like blood vessels.”

“M-mhh…”

“I understand that this was all wasted effort, but at least decide whether you’re angry or embarrassed about it while rubbing your inner thighs together like that. …At any rate, the most pathetic conclusion would be if we were attacked now.”

SUB.16

HsB-07.

An updated version of the Academy City supersonic bombers that fought in World War III shot through the sky above Baggage City.

To protect his body from the massive Gs, the pilot, Rokudou Ryuuichi, had his body mostly frozen. He did not use his fingers to control the giant craft and he did not use his mouth to communicate with his allies.

The distribution of blood in his brain, the amount of chemicals secreted, the flow of electronic signals, and monitoring of the active regions of his brain with sonar were some of the methods of directly gathering information from his brain. The accuracy of each method was low, but that could be overcome by using multiple methods. The technology had also begun to be used experimentally in intelligence and criminal investigations.

“Francisca 3 to all crafts. We will attack the airport on the next turn. 1 and 2, you take the overpasses. We need to destroy every long road that can be used to launch enemy fighters.”

A few dozen praying mantis-looking Five Overs had already been scattered about the area, so the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians already had no means of victory.

However, the Five Overs had a weakness.

They were created in order to target objects on the surface.

They could fly, but that was only to sweep over ground enemies from above like an attack helicopter. They were not intended to be used to shoot down multi-purpose fighters flying at supersonic speeds at high altitude.

Rokudou heard (or at least interpreted it that way) his comrades’ voices.

“It’s crazy for actual people like us to be putting our lives on the line to protect unmanned weapons. I thought those toys could shoot down air-to-surface missiles.”

“If you put a chemical weapon in the warhead, it’ll still rain down on them from above if they shoot it down. Although this is probably us overreacting because we know about that weakness. This is the first time the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians have seen the Five Overs, so I doubt they could come up with that strategy.”

While chatting via thoughts faster than would be possible via mouth and ear, they each arrived at their respective target at 7,000 kph.

They less “dropped” their bombs and more “placed” them in the air.

Approximately 120 precision guided bombs were set at even intervals like streetlights. As gravity started to pull them down, the tail corrected their course sending them into the important points of the airport with accuracy that had a margin of error no greater than 7 mm.

As his body was frozen, Rokudou had no way of turning around, but he could check the destruction on a window displayed at the edge of his consciousness.

“Runways, taxiways, and radar facilities 1-9 have been destroyed. Surface-to-air missiles 1-32, antiaircraft autocannons 1-20, and antiaircraft guns 1-17 have all been destroyed. The airport is essentially nonfunctional.”

“Whew. About 48 of the straight areas of road over 13 meters wide have been destroyed. I’m going to turn around and take out the remaining 52.”

“I’ve detected about 5 tunnels that could be used as runways. I’m going to bomb the entrances to fill them with rubble.”

Their results were coming in exactly as planned.

The Academy City supersonic bombers had specs high enough to enter the front lines without any fighters protecting them. Their overwhelming speed and mobility prevented any ground attacks or chasing fighters from getting anywhere near them.

In the current mission, the greatest threat was trouble caused by improper maintenance. That was how inadequate the Anti-Academy City Science Guardian forces were.

It was true they had unmanned weapons borrowed from Academy City.

However, those were merely borrowed.

Also, the speed of technological advancement in Academy City was so fast that those weapons were already obsolete.

It was a flawless victory.

The reality did not stray from the theory in the slightest.

The victors of World War III who used weapons holding the name “Hard Science” seemed to have an elegant formula while within that savage battle. They broke the spirits of all who wished to recklessly oppose that theory.

Or so it should have been.

However…

“What is that?”

Numerous points of light suddenly appeared on the radar. It was not something that had been hiding using some form of stealth. Rokudou checked the cameras on the bottom of his craft and saw something like a large missile shooting up from the surface.

“No…That isn’t a missile. Its form is changing!?”

Whatever it was shot through the sky. It did not move in a gentle arc like a normal aircraft. It almost looked like horizontal-running lightning. Also, when it passed through the side of a skyscraper, the giant building’s top portion was sliced off diagonally.

Before the giant mass fell to the ground, interference ran through Rokudou Ryuuichi’s thoughts. Extreme tension and fear interfered with his connection to the craft.

The reason was simple.

Whatever it was was shooting straight for the HsB-07 like lightning even as the craft turned sharp corners at 7000 kph.

“This is insane! What is that thing!? That isn’t one of the unmanned weapons Academy City loaned them!!”

As it approached, Rokudou Ryuuichi was finally able to see the visual details of the object.

It reminded him of the early stealth fighters that were made up of a complicated combination of flat surfaces. However, that was only because he knew a lot about aircrafts. Others may have been more reminded of a javelin with an enlarged tip or a delicately cut gem.

However, there was one thing anyone would have been reminded of.

A wireframe.

In fact, the craft was actually made up of a combination of multiple wires. The enemy was not only unexplainable by “outside” technology, but even Rokudou and his specialty knowledge from within Academy City could not understand what he was seeing. English words in orange light unnaturally appeared around it.

“We too love the cutting edge.”

It did not end there.

The first line disappeared and a second sentence was displayed.

“However, that is not your privilege alone.”

“Damn you! Francisca 1 and 2, I need to shake the enemy craft from my tail. You cross my path and leave some bombs in the air! Blow it away with-…!!”

Rokudou Ryuuichi’s words trailed off.

He saw something in the camera.

Francisca 1 had been completely swallowed up by a transformed mass of wires and was being dropped down in to the middle of the white city. Francisca 2 had barely managed to avoid getting wrapped up by another one, but the narrow wires had sliced pieces off the edges of the craft, destroying its ability to fly.

They had no way of knowing, but the enemy was a spiritual item known as Loki’s Net. The evil god Loki slipped through the laws, labyrinths, and fate created by the gods with novel ideas, breaking taboos, and sophism and he himself created that self-defeating constraint when thinking about what it would take to surely capture himself, the one who could not be captured by anyone. A true Dvergr that had survived to the modern day had added modern performance to that.

There was no reason a magical net that plugged up even the holes in theory and fate would be defeated by something like speed.

Rokudou desperately tried to escape, but he could tell his craft was being whittled down little by little. Also, the other wires that had taken out his allies were headed for Francisca 3 as well.

“Francisca 3 to AWACS! Send Francisca 4-9 with their ABLs in from patrolling around the outside Baggage City. Let’s use the anti-ballistic missile lasers to see if their secret weapons can play tag with light!!”

He got the order out, but they did not make it in time.

Either the horizontal lightning-like enemy crafts’ movements could not be targeted or Francisca 3’s allies were trying to find a position that would not get Francisca 3 wrapped up in it. Whatever the reason, Rokudou Ryuuchi could tell that few seconds of lag were more than he had.

“AWACS to Francisca 3. Eject! Your engine is about to blow!!”

“Do they look like gentlemen? They’d just slice me to pieces, parachute and all!!”

His altitude dropped significantly.

He was no longer flying; he was falling slowly.

Rokudou Ryuuchi greatly changed his heading. He charged toward the area the eerie wire crafts had first come from.

(The garbage disposal facility? Wait, there's someone on the roof.)

It was one of the top priority targets. A girl with brown skin and silver hair stood up against a giant smokestack. She wore glasses and nothing else but overalls which was very odd for such an arctic area. With a loose smile on her face, she stared straight at Rokudou Ryuuichi.

The girl knew a supersonic bomber was approaching, but she held up her slender index finger and motioned inward in challenge.

"That bitch. So she's from Gremlin, our top priority target!!"

Despite his craft being worn down, he opened the throttle and aimed straight for the garbage disposal facility roof.

He could see orange sparks on the cameras.

Then the cameras themselves started to be destroyed and they showed only gray static.

The craft grew smaller and smaller like a pencil being sharpened by a small knife, but Rokudou Ryuuichi focused only on his target.

And…

♦

As she stood atop the garbage disposal facility roof, Marian Slingeneyer stuck a hand into her overalls from the side and pulled out a gold tool. It was a pair of tongs. The tool was used for handling hot blades and the like when they were in in the furnace. The pair Marian held was something like giant pliers.

She lightly swung around the two handles like nunchuks before closing the tongs in front of her face.

The end tightly held a sharp fragment of aircraft materials only about 13 cm long.

That was all that remained of Rokudou Ryuuichi's final efforts.

When she looked at the fragment that caused the blowing snow to evaporate immediately, Marian whistled.

“That was close. I almost tried to grab it with my bare hands, but the friction heated this up to over 1000 degrees I’m betting.”

Marian stabbed the tip of the tongs holding the fragment into the snow piled up on the roof to rapidly cool them. As one who worked as a blacksmith, she was used to the action. After it had been cooled to a normal temperature, she grabbed the sharp fragment directly from the tongs.

“So that’s how it works. Categorically, it’s just a support spiritual item that only seals off one’s escape similar to creating a doll that wards off the target of a curse, but it looks like it got a nice effect of matching the enemy’s speed.”

In fact, there was nothing better when it came to destroying aircraft.

Marian had focused on the aerial strategy first rather than the Five Overs in the city because she did not want any more Kiharas to be brought in.

“To your reckless defiance☆.”

She lightly kissed the side of the sharp fragment and stuck it inside her overalls as a souvenir. She snapped her fingers and a few more Loki’s Nets shot up into the sky from around the garbage disposal facility.

Just as Marian was getting excited, a brilliant beam of light flashed by overhead.

An airborne laser weapon had fired from outside Baggage City and burned away one of the Loki’s Nets. Only glowing orange melted fragments were left behind in the wake of the pure white beam.

“Well, shit! I guess this won’t all be easy!!”

As she frantically escaped from the roof, Marian ordered the surviving Loki’s Nets to continually exterminate the other aircrafts.

That twisted battle developed into a scene in which people could not survive.

SUB.17

Kumokawa Maria and Oumi Shuri walked down an untouched underground passageway while not knowing where it led. A large scale battle must have been occurring above ground because irregular tremors shook the small passageway.

“May I ask a question?” asked Oumi Shuri in a low voice.

“What is it?”

“Do you know of an individual named Kamijou Touma?” she continued with no real change of expression. “He was mentioned by that helmeted man in the coat who seems to be the person you are pursuing. Apparently, if we do not find this individual, we have very low odds of survival now that we have become this deeply involved.”

“I only know the name. I think my older sister would know more.”

“I take it he is from Academy City then. If he is able to deal with a situation like this, he must be involved at a very deep level.”

“From what I’ve heard, he is cute because of how he has no connections to that kind of thing.”

“?”

Oumi Shuri frowned, but she did not receive a proper response from Kumokawa Maria.

However, this was not because Kumokawa refused to tell her.

Instead, the situation quickly changed.

With a loud crash, the passageway in front of them collapsed from above and a heavy tank fell down with a rain of debris.

“Cough! Cough cough!! What the hell!?”

As Kumokawa Maria coughed amid all the dust, Oumi Shuri remained calm as she was used to chemicals and smokescreens.

“It is a 50 ton Russian bento box. It must have fallen through the ground. Something like that was not meant to be running through the city area!”

“Russian? …So it’s part of the Baggage City forces?”

The hatch on the machine gun emplacement on top of the turret was open. Kumokawa Maria started to approach the tank in order to drag out any injured soldiers, but…

“You idiot! Do you *want* to die!?”

Oumi Shuri tackled her to the ground.

Immediately afterwards, the outer surface of the tank exploded. It did not seem like the fuel or shells had ignited. It was more like a large scale shotgun blast.

“It’s completely covered in explosive reactive armor. Basically, it’s a giant piece of unexploded ordnance. Getting close will only get you caught in the blast.”

“I see. Then it’s time for static electricity.”

“?”

“We’ll cause a reaction in the fuses to safely detonate it all. With all this dust floating around, a little science experiment should cause a simple discharge.”

“The lightning phenomenon that uses volcanic ash?”

“Oh, do they talk about it in your ninja scroll of secrets?”

They were going to artificially cause static electricity, but Kumokawa Maria and Oumi Shuri did not search for anything to create the electricity. It was going to come from the friction caused by the dust floating in the air.

What they needed was a tool to move that dust in a set direction with a set strength.

In other words, they needed something like a fan.

“So I took off my maid uniform.”

“…Couldn’t you have just taken off the apron?”

“Why didn’t you say something before I had taken the whole thing off?”

Wearing only her underwear, Kumokawa Maria waved her maid uniform up and down in both hands like she was trying to beat the air with a washed sheet.

With a great flapping noise, the light gray dust started to move.

Immediately after a bluish-white flash, small sounds of explosions came from various places across the tank blocking the passageway. It sounded like a firecracker only louder.

"Has all the popcorn been popped? Then it's time for the rescue," said Kumokawa Maria as she cheerfully put back on her maid uniform.

However, Oumi Shuri frowned before peering into the open hatch below the machine gun emplacement.

"…It may be unmanned."

"Hah?"

"The machine gun has a motor attached and the cable leads inside. It also has an added antenna that would not be needed for searching for the enemy."

"So there's no one even worth saving?"

Kumokawa Maria peered inside the hatch along with Oumi Shuri, but the kunoichi was right and no one was inside. The cover of the control console had been removed and a tablet device had been attached to the motherboard within using a cable.

The screen displayed S. Berylan which was likely the name of whoever was controlling it.

"It's mostly electronic, so they can control it remotely. The outer machine gun alone could not be controlled by a program, so they had to attach that motor to it."

"I don't know about Academy City's technology, but this looks very hurriedly thrown together."

"Well, yeah. Ways to reuse outdated weapons are ideas produced in thought experiments. Basically, they are nothing more than something like ideas developed from a discussion on an online message board. Academy City would not use a method like this that could probably be easily hijacked by someone else."

"What do you think about the fact that Baggage City is using something like this?"

"Their actual military might may be less than what they announced."

At any rate, the underground passageway was blocked by the tank and the debris. To move forward, they had to exit to the surface through the hole the tank had created.

However, they regretted this two seconds after crawling out.

It was a blizzard outside.

It was a hell of -20 degrees.

“It’s cold! This is no place to be wearing a maid uniform!!”

“Is anywhere a good place to be wearing a maid uniform?”

“I don’t want to hear that from a cheerleader kunoichi. Anyway, let’s just get to the nearest building! We can think after that!!”

Unfortunately, the gas station Kumokawa Maria pointed toward was blown to smithereens immediately after she finished speaking. Viscous flames as if from a Molotov cocktail rained down on the buildings near the gas station. Kumokawa Maria was knocked to the ground by the shockwave and she finally noticed the straight line of black smoke passing by over her head. However, she could not see what was causing the smoke.

What she could see was some strange aircraft that looked like an aggregation of wires passing by at tremendous speed and following the smoke.

Kumokawa Maria gave voice to her guess.

“Is that an Academy City supersonic bomber sending out that smoke? How much damage has it taken? Fragments and bombs are being scattered all over the place!”

“Well, at least we won’t be worried for lack of warmth.”

Kumokawa Maria spotted a soldier at a distance toss aside a tablet device and flee from the approaching flames. She did not know which side he was on, but he may have been the one who had been controlling the tank.

“These blasts are hurting my skin but not warming me at all… Oh, crap. That building is falling this way!!”

The two of them got up from the snow and ran the other way.

Unlike with a proper building implosion, the supporting pillars were only partially broken and the building was falling completely to the side. The lower floors had been unable to withstand the weight and had been destroyed, so the building had collapsed down a bit before falling over like a giant collapsing from his knees. Due to this, Kumokawa Maria and Oumi Shuri managed to escape safely even if just barely.

However, they had just been passing through underground passageways directly below that area.

The ground collapsed under the great weight.

Kumokawa Maria and Oumi Shuri were swallowed up by the broken ground.

“Cough cough!! The surface is just as bad!!”

“Well, at least it isn’t a sewer under here.”

They crawled through gaps in the collapsed underground passageway and made it to a safe area. Oumi Shuri sat with her back leaning up against the passageway wall and suddenly asked a question.

“What is this Kamijou Touma supposed to be able to do in this situation?”

“I-I have no idea. Let’s just pray that we don’t find out he’s already been killed or something. With this city, it wouldn’t surprise me.”

They had no room to count on others.

To survive, they had to walk on their own two feet.

SUB.18

"Whew, damn it. I should have brought along pure fighter-types even if it adds on to the burden of the plan. This really doesn't suit my style."

Having returned to the waste treatment facility, Marian entered a personal room that's magic barrier had been destroyed. Even if it was Loki's Net, the outcome wasn't guaranteed. She had to take out her secret weapon to deal with such a chaotic battlefield.

Marian sat on the chair in the room, and grabbed the transparent bottle on the table. It was a juice that was made from malt. This beverage may have been rather rare among the Japanese, but this Norse magician liked it. In fact, it was easier to get beer, and it fit her identity really well. But Marian Slingeneyer was clearly aware that beer made her sick, so she never drank alcohol.

She took a direct gulp of malt juice from the bottle, and then whipped out her smartphone. What she actually needed wasn't a communication device, but to adjust her mouth and ears to receive signals. Turning one's own voice into electronic signals and processing it uniquely would have the use of encrypting it completely. Because of this, Marian deliberately used the technology of the enemy, the science side, to communicate.

"Sigyn, where are you right now?"

"Erm, where am I? Where is this place? Baggage City is too big. I'm not so sure myself. They could have just made it simple. They could have just made everything simple."

"Whatever. Can you hurry up and meet up with me? I repeated so many times that I'm not a fighting-type personnel anymore. Besides, what do you want me to do here? Isn't there someone more useful like Mjölnir or something?"

"It's busy over there. We can't add to their troubles. You know that."

"Then we'll meet up."

"So I say, where is this place? I say, I can't do anything if there's nobody else around. I'm the same as you here, Marian. You can't modify your own body, right, Marian? That isn't any difference; it's the same."

"Your ability is suggestions and my ability is modifications, you mean?"

“That’s right. My nature is to give what I have to others to make up for what they lack. If I try to be perfect myself, I couldn’t make up for what I lack.”

Sigyn was the name of the wife of the evil god Loki. This magician, who was entitled with the name Sigyn, had given a suggestion that was ambiguously magic. Thus, it was a mystery whether she was a magician or not. But this didn’t matter. Gremlin was just a kind of existence that would squeeze something dry once it had value and continued to expand like that.

From the Norse god’s name that was given, one could tell that both Sigyn and Útgarða-Loki were official members of Gremlin.

“How about you give me a suggestion then. A suggestion to find the lost Sigyn.”

“Ooh, so there’s such an idea.”

“I say, you really don’t know how to use it. You’re an existence that’s able to give a suggestion 100% accurately. If you could use your power on yourself, maybe you can even reach the realm of being a Magic God.”

“Whatever. If my suggestion can make anyone succeed, it’ll be my success anyway.”

“Hurry up and suggest.”

“Okay.”

Both Marian and Sigyn weren’t the type that could succeed on their own. But once they helped others, they would create a large fighting force and even end up being able to rewrite history. They didn’t know how many of the Kiharas were left, but if Sigyn gave a suggestion, it would have made up for Marian Slingeneyer’s flaw…her skill in direct combat, and she wouldn’t end up in a tough battle with Kihara Byouri. Though there was a need to suggest according to the situation, but with such a premise, they would have sent the Kiharas to their graves with overwhelming force.

To meet up with her ally who was also lost, Marian Slingeneyer got a suggestion to the searching skill. But at this moment, Sigyn said,

“It’s tough, isn’t it?”

“There’s obviously some misses with the assignments. I’m so tired. I even thought of calling Bersi.”

Marian leaned her body on the back of the chair which felt good, and then shook her legs under the table. The mouth that contained the malt juice continued,

“So basically, the Natural Selector? It’s a mistake to mobilize us just to defend this tournament. The cost won’t be worth it. I’m really lacking in motivation.”

“Ahh. Establishment of a global standard for the replacement of Academy City’s espers…*was just a lie, wasn’t it*?”

Sigyn said these decisive words.

But Marian Slingeneyer said in a matter-of-fact tone,

“As for the old men who have already become minced meat, the objective was like that. The moment the participants indicated that they wanted to take part in the Natural Selector tournament, one could recognize the objective of the participants that took part. There are all sorts of reasons; whether it’s because of sick family members or a research team defending themselves in an argument in school, or whether it’s to introduce funds to their hometown where people were starving. Anyway, once they get recognized by the world, one can tell what they actually want.”

All the participants had a reason they couldn’t back away.

Also, these reasons wouldn’t disappear even if they lost in the tournament.

On the contrary, they would stay.

And then, they would merely be digested and cleaned off in a place where nobody knew, as the things they definitely didn’t want to lose crumbled in the hell in front of them.

“Because of that, they could blackmail and control what the participants do. The organizer would give full support and assistance to the winner of the Natural Selector. And to those who suffered defeat, they would raise suggestions like ‘if you disappear like a loser, your personal motives will lose. So what will you do?’ and things like that before giving them the ring of a revived defeatist.”

In other words, it would be the complete opposite of the revealed reason.

It wasn’t to let a large number of people fight it out and choose the strongest amongst them.

Whether it was a victory or defeat in the tournament, everyone couldn’t get away from it. Whether it was assistance or threats, they just needed to use all sorts of means to make all the participants become Anti-Academy City Science Guardians and make them unable to escape.

UFOs, dinosaurs, Out-Of-Place Artifacts, electromagnetic waves, microbiology, UMAs, underground humans…these people that researched on the overly ridiculous existences in this world all had their own sources of funds. In other words, the power of reality.

This martial arts tournament was held to gather such power in their hands.

In that case…

“What the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians wanted wasn’t the 100+ participants, but the strength of the 100+ organizations supporting them from behind. They just wanted to get them and expand their power, increase their range of control and try to fight against Academy City. This Natural Selector held for some natural selection was basically just something created out of the desire to expand.”

“It’s because of that that we can mix in our own objectives.”

“That’s right. That’s kind of our final redemption. In fact, we’re just increasing the pressure after all.”

Marian sighed and remained in her sitting passion as she pushed her chair back under the table.

“Really, these healing goods really helped me out. Without these, I would surely snap. It’s most important to satisfy my inner heart after all, especially for intelligent professionals like us.”

“Let me make a suggestion about that bad taste of yours.”

“Really?”

“Your interest is unpleasant. *Dissecting living people and making them into the shape of furniture?* I never want to be invited to your tea party.”

“You think so?” Marian Slingeneyer tilted her head without showing much emotion.

Her chair had the name Telerie, the floor stand had the name Frank, and the table had the name *Cendrillon*. At times, the sounds of moaning could be heard. These people that were shaped as furniture all had their organs inside, and the surfaces all had faces, so they could breath, eat and sleep…in other words, they were alive. Marian Slingeneyer’s job wasn’t to repair corpses, but to modify people that were alive.

While stroking the flesh-colored high-class furniture to her fingers, Marian smiled.

“I’ll only make one that suits the purpose best. This is punishment for them. Humans only have one life; it’s unfair to kill all of them if they sin to a certain extent. In that case, why not just kill 100 people instead of 1? Wouldn’t it be even more worth it? I turned them into furniture to make them atone for crimes committed.. Well, I modified them into healing goods, so I can’t deny it when you say that I added a little of my interests into it.”

“That’s some bad taste.”

“Really?”

“I’m a little worried if Útgarða-Loki became one of them.”

"I'm a little unhappy that I could make such a conclusion so carelessly. Well, there's no need to go to such an extent, right? It's not like he managed to hurt us because he betrayed us. Spirits won't attack hardworking and upright people, you know?"

Sigyn could use the ever-powerful suggestion, but a suggestion was merely a suggestion. Even she didn't know how to use it or even whether it could be used.

"Anyway, you're our secret weapon, Sigyn, so don't go about on your own. Even I intend to fight with your assistance. If something happens to you, the entire power balance will change drastically."

And then Marian Slingeneyer stopped talking.

The Dvergr girl became expressionless, and immediately grinned.

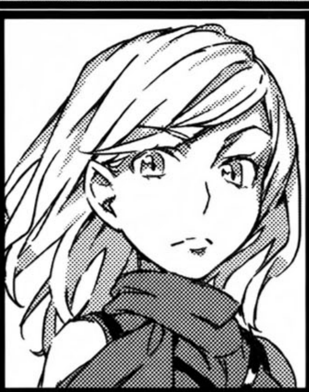
"…But why must there be so tragic victims that are to appear here out of a sudden? My voice has been encrypted via the communication device, but my *real* voice is different."

Still sitting on the chair, Marian threw the malt juice bottle at the door. With the sound of the glass shattering, the ajar door was wide open.

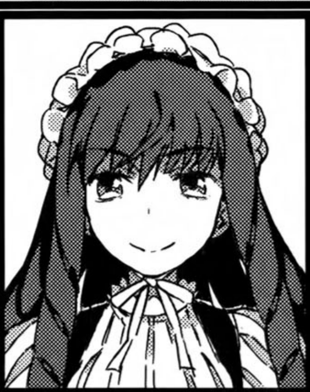
Standing there were Kumokawa Maria and Oumi Shuri.

Marian Slingeneyer continued to play with the golden saw she took out from her overalls as she said,

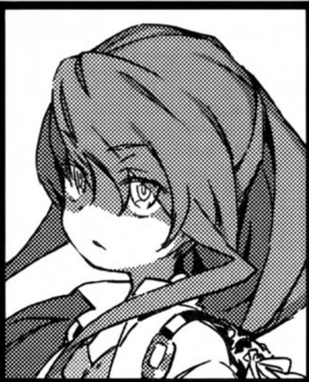
"I want to add a footrest to the chair and a mini-fridge to store cold drinks. Which one do you want to be respectively?"



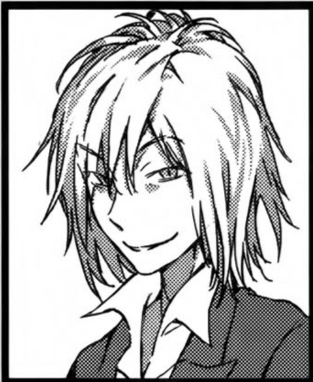
Natural Selector competitor
Saflee Opendays



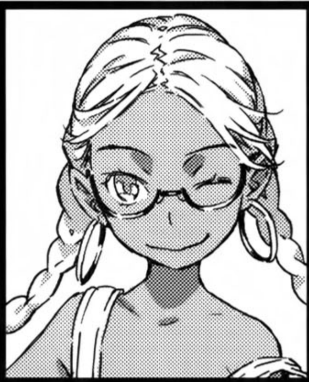
Academy City's maid girl
Kumokawa Maria



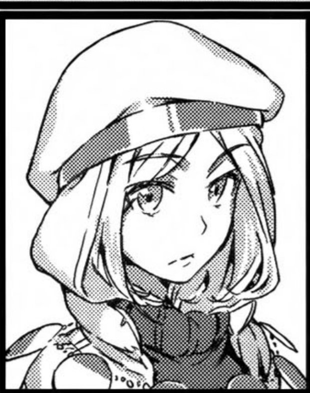
Natural Selector competitor
Oumi Shuri



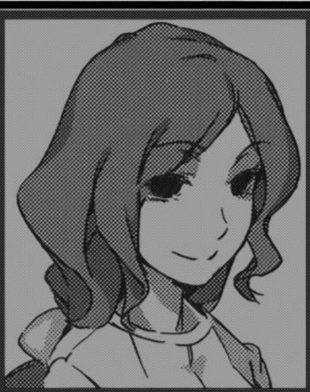
GREMLIN's official member
Útgarða-Loki



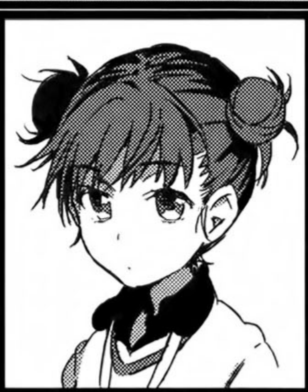
GREMLIN's official member
Marian Slingeneyer



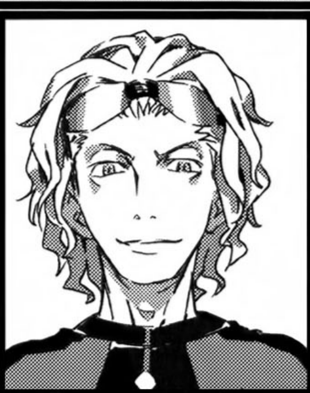
GREMLIN's official member
Sigyn



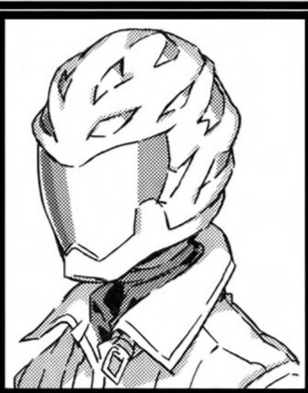
Kihara family
Kihara Byouri



Kihara family
Kihara Enshuu



Kihara family
Kihara Ransuu



Helmeted Man

CONFIDENTIAL
DOCUMENTS

SUB.19

“Not here~”

The one who muttered that in such a naïve tone was Kihara Enshuu. Her clothing was completely wet with snow and mud. What she saw was a complex image that was received from the smartphone on her head and the 1seg TV in her hands that showed the reflection of the walls of the buildings off the windows.

“*Un, un, there’s not enough damage, but things are proceeding smoothly. Sorry, Amata-ojisan. These words sound like where the Amatas are is safe.*”

Right now, she was in a large residential area. The rectangular buildings were all arranged in rows like books on the shelves of a library. Most likely, it was because of the auto-lock that the passage didn’t feel like the veranda of the outside of a building, but was designed more like something that was built through the building.

However, it was just that.

With a thick and heavy bladed snowplow, she could destroy the gate’s auto-lock. All the rooms would be weaker than the auto-locks. Thus, they could break the deadlock by drilling through between the door and the wall before activating the switch.

She opened the door and went in to investigate. What was in front of her was a room that was completely lifeless.

There was a lot of identical furniture. It was like a hotel that offered the lowest rent per unit for a week.

“I was told to do everything from scratch, so everyone will end up scolding me, I guess. This really isn’t like what the Kiharas would do.”

The objects that had some form of life felt really bone-chilling here.

This scene here really reminded people of the Mary Celeste.

"…There're already 500,000 residents here, and there's another 3 million tourists who decided to stay for the time being because of the Natural Selector. Both sides are people involved and disguised as part of the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians. But where exactly did they go to? If they all went out at the same time, there should be a large commotion."

The unnatural muttering echoed in the empty room.

I have to rethink through my thoughts.

This is part of my data, from my short-term memory to my long term memory.

This is the operation I've carried out up 'till now.

Kihara Enshuu muttered some excessive words as she continued with her investigations. She opened the door to the next room, and then opened the door of the corridor leading to the next room.

"Such philanthropists. No, that's not it. The Academy City army that snuck into Baggage City was defeated. That means that the Piper of Hameln only helped the ordinary people in Baggage City."

She didn't expect 3.5 million people to actually hide in such a place. Or rather, she hadn't found a large facility that could contain so many people.

"It's impossible for them to leave the town. Even if they weren't eliminated by the Five Overs, it's a low temperature of -20 degrees Celsius outside. They'll definitely die before they reach the next town."

If she thought of it that way, they should definitely be hiding in this town.

Where several places were divided into small districts.

In that case, she should forget about finding any dome facilities where a large number of people would obviously be gathered.

For example, in such a large residential area, if one ignored the living conditions and packed everyone in like trains, each building could hold about 45,000 people. Places that look inaccessible would inexplicably hold lots of people…that was Hameln's method.

"…Maybe I should start blowing things up. Everything should end if I blow up the entire place. Even if they escape from the explosions, they would freeze to death once they lose their hiding places."

That was actually the simplest way.

Even if the explosions couldn't kill off all the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians, it could act as an effective groundwork before the decisive battle. It was a common method to destroy enemy structures, weapons, covers, and long-distance objects.

And the reason not to do so was also simple.

"Nope. Things will get complicated if Gremlin dies."

In a normal situation, Academy City and its allies would have expected the outcome.

However, it was different with Gremlin in the picture. Even after gathering clustered-type gas bombs to blow the entire town to dust, they might even last through. Also, if unidentified bodies appeared in piles, Gremlin might use this to escape.

First, they had to thoroughly destroy Gremlin.

Erasing Baggage City from the map would take place after that.

"It's really troublesome when the order's all messed up. Now we're stuck in the same predicament as the normal army."

At first, Kihara Enshuu's aim wasn't to search through Baggage City for civilians.

But if Gremlin and the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians were allied and planning something in Baggage City, they should keep this town in its original state where everyone was alive and the town was bustling. In other words, once they killed off people who were unrelated to this incident (not out of kindness or justice, but just so that they won't lose out on their benefits), Gremlin would appear to prevent this situation.

All just to search for them.

All just to kill them.

…But in this situation,

"How bothersome—"

Kihara Enshuu gave the expression of a lost child as she muttered.

The smartphone that was hanging from her neck and the 1seg TV showed complex images one after another.

"*Un, un, I got it, Amata-ojisan. The Kiharas will do this at this moment.*"

Kihara Enshuu small hands tugged at the sides of her skirt as she jumped up lightly.

This continued for 10 seconds. She tilted her head.

“…So nobody’s going to come out~?”

Is my stomach cold? Kihara Enshuu felt a chill down her back as she started to move to the next destination.

MAIN.20

Kumokawa Maria and Oumi Shuri did not dive headfirst into that sea of blood because they wanted to. Kumokawa Maria was speaking about the helmeted man.

“Kihara Kagun,” she named him. “He was made to be deeply involved in the death of a minor at a certain Academy City elementary school. I must pursue him no matter what. I am very mindful of my own pride, but I am willing to destroy even that to accomplish this.”

However, the two of them understood that the situation in Baggage City was not normal. Merely staying there was a huge risk.

Kumokawa Maria’s goal was Kihara Kagun.

Oumi Shuri’s was the investigation of supernatural powers.

Neither of those goals had to be carried out within Baggage City. Both the Kiharas and Gremlin would leave Baggage City once the conflict was over. They could merely restart their investigation in secret once their targets were breathing a sigh of relief. As such, the two of them planned to leave Baggage City and redo it all after constructing an accurate information network.

However, sometimes beginner’s luck would lead people like them to a secret.

It led them there whether they wanted it to or not.

Like the kinds of pitiful witnesses who ended up deep under the sea or a mountain.

“…”

They had not tried to head toward anything like that. They had been trying to leave Baggage City as quickly as possible. They had already given up. They had known that was the wisest option. And yet Kumokawa Maria and Oumi Shuri’s escape route had passed by Marian Slingeneyer’s private room, the door had been cracked open, and the magical barrier was no longer functioning.

As a result, they had arrived at a certain truth.

And that truth was one that invited certain death.

While walking down the maintenance passageways for the hot water pipes, they had arrived at the garbage disposal facility at the center. While walking through that facility, they had come upon a certain room. They had not intended to peer inside the cracked door.

"…Why now of all times?"

They had only overheard a voice. And then darkness had burst from that crack into which they must not peer.

(I don't recognize that maid, but the other one is a contestant in Natural Selector. I would rather not kill someone from Baggage City's side, but the information about Sigyn is just too valuable. Too bad.)

Surrounded by psychedelic skin-colored furniture, Marian Slingeneyer smiled with her gold saw in one hand.

"I've been wanting a footrest and a small fridge for drinks. Which one wants to be which?"

Hell began.

Kumokawa Maria and Oumi Shuri did not choose to fight. Without hesitation, they spun around and ran off at full speed. They ran through the garbage disposal facility and back into the maintenance passageway they had come from. Even that was not the best option. In fact, no option could really be called "good" once they had run into her.

"Wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-what were those!? Were they some kind of cyborg!?"

Even someone as used to supernatural powers as Kumokawa Maria had fallen into a panic at the sight.

However, Oumi Shuri must have been used to the kinds of corpses that could be created under normal circumstances.

"One strategy to fill your enemy with great fear and high medical fees is to destroy their body without killing them and then abandon them. For example, you could lay out anti-personnel mines that only blow off a single leg. That was probably something like that! It may also have its roots in the idea of mutilating enemy corpses!!"

"Are you sure there's that much to it!? From that look on her face, I'd say she does it for fun!"

It was on a completely different level.

It was more grotesque than anything they could imagine.

It was unclear what you would have to do to turn a normal human into a living table, but they certainly did not want to fight someone who could pull it off. They might be able to win, but who knows what would have become of their body by that point. It would not be surprising if they had a drill for a right hand or could fire flames from the bottom of their feet like rockets.

“Ah, no, no. Like I said, now that you’ve heard about our trump card Sigyn, I have to silence you.”

A loud metallic noise reverberated through the area. Kumokawa Maria turned around while running to see the girl pursuing them with a blade pressed against the passageway wall. She was only 50 meters behind them. If she had a gun, that would be within range, but she held a hammer and a saw made of gold.

“Wasn’t this way blocked by the tank and the collapsed building!?”

“That can actually work to our advantage. If we slip through the gaps in the rubble and then fill them up afterwards, we can stop her pursuit. That will require heading up to the freezing surface, but that’s still better than taking her on.”

They had a goal.

They had a bit of a lead.

This was not a fight they could not win.

(We just might make i—!)

Just as Kumokawa Maria was feeling some relief, the wall directly to her side suddenly bulged out to crush her.

“Wha—?”

She thought some kind of bulkhead had activated or that it was a trap from some ancient ruins like in an action movie, but that was not it.

“A human…!?” shouted Oumi Shuri.

It had been a human transformed to have the same texture, coloration, and luster as the wall. It was unclear who or what it had originally been. The human had been altered to the shape of a rectangular pillar and had slammed out into Kumokawa Maria’s side.

“!!”

She immediately twisted her body and gently touched the side of the pillar with her right arm to rotate her entire body and completely escape the impact that was on the level of being hit by a car. However, the core of the issue was not there.

Again and again, both horizontally and vertically, similar rectangular pillars shot out, filling the passageway space. In just a few seconds, the passageway was completely filled with obstacles colored the same as the floor and walls.

Their path of escape was cut off.

“It’s not easy keeping them alive like that, you know. I mean, they’re rectangles,” said the brown girl with a grin. “I left them all over the place so I could fight at any moment. Since their sensory organs would be wasted otherwise, I had them double as sensors for me, but that didn’t work out too well. A Kihara even managed to slip past them in a wheelchair. Their eyes and ears are functioning, but the ego needed to process the information seems to reject the images of what they have become.”

It was not a one-time thing.

Nor was she only altering people when she had no other choice.

Over the entire area, she had caused a set level of damage as if she were stocking up on disaster goods such as crackers and instant noodles that would likely pass their expiration date without use.

“Their eyes and ears are functioning?”

“If you want to leave, you only need to think of them as obstacles. Of course, you will be slicing a living human’s body in two when you do so, so it may be a little bit difficult. A knife from the supermarket would probably chip when you get to the backbone. Really, you should smash the bones with a blunt weapon before doing the cutting, but then the slimy fat will get on the blade and dull its edge.”

Her words sent a chill down Kumokawa Maria’s back.

A question dealing with human life and taking it from others. The essence of someone who looked down on it. A proposition that normally no one ever thought about but put a heavy emotional strain on them once they did.

Was it right to destroy those pillars to protect oneself?

Was it right to view them as human and therefore not finish them off?

Was it right to view it as wrong?

Was it wrong to view it as wrong?

“What do we do?” Kumokawa Maria asked Oumi Shuri.

“I don’t like it, but have no choice but to destroy this enemy element to create a path out.”

As the two faced forward once more, the brown girl, Marian Slingeneyer smiled and spun her saw around.

“So you’ve chosen the way forward. Well, I suppose that’s the standard answer. That’s how humans handle their own lives. But,” added Marian, “that kind of uninteresting thinking will get you nowhere with Gremlin.”

Marian Slingeneyer ran. In a straight line. Without making a feint. As if she had decided on her target merely by who she had spotted first, she headed straight for Oumi Shuri. The other two specialized in hand-to-hand combat, so she seemed to be full of openings, but the problem lay with her gold hammer and saw.

Oumi Shuri pulled out her gardening trowel-type kunai, but…

“You won’t make it in time!!”

Kumokawa Maria’s leg cut in from the side.

She kicked at Oumi Shuri rather than Marian Slingeneyer. The gold weapons cut through empty air. As Kumokawa Maria circled around Marian Slingeneyer, she shouted a warning to Oumi Shuri who had fallen to the ground.

“Don’t charge toward someone with supernatural powers before you know how they work! Don’t try to fight her! Even if you get a good blow in, a single slice in return could turn you into one of those tables made of human flesh!!”

“Oh, you’ve already grasped my special trait? If you’re so used to these mysterious things, are you perhaps from Academy City? In that case, I truly can’t let you get away.” Marian swung around her saw and smiled without turning around. “My goal is not to slice you with my saw or strike you with my hammer. Each tool is merely built in the ideal form for getting across my intent to alter you. The primary items needed to alter objects have been collected into 7 categories. From the instant this gold touches you, the human alteration begins.”

“Does it use nanodevices that enter the body and…no. Is it a high-tech medical tool that causes a chain reaction on the cellular level to send the alteration from the outside of the body to deep within using the osmotic pressure of the cells?”

“That’s completely wrong, you idiot. In fact, this isn’t even specialized for the human body. I’m only altering the human body with a function of the tool. Well, you may have the theory completely wrong, but it gives you the right idea in the end. I guess that’s type of talent.”

If you were hit even once, you would eventually lose your body.

In fact, you could even suddenly turn into a chair or table.

(Even a single counterattack while trying to throw her or grab her would be the end of it. I guess my only option is to fight focusing on building up damage!!)

“A passive strategy, hm?” Marian Slingeneyer had seen straight through her. “Keeping your distance would be the best way of avoiding my tools, but it would be difficult to get within range and then take me out in a single blow, wouldn’t it? The standard is to try to counter and build the damage little by little. Well, if you have some stronger technique like a high kick or something, that would be different, but…I don’t need to say more, do I?”

In a battle without rules, a high kick aimed for the head came with the risk of having your leg grabbed and being dragged down. Even if that did not happen, once you were supporting yourself on a single leg, your quick footwork giving you a longer reach would be unusable.

In other words, it simply added the risk of a counterattack.

“In the end, continually using your one safe card is nothing more than slowly trapping yourself.”

Marian Slingeneyer stopped spinning around her saw so that it pointed toward Kumokawa Maria’s head.

The brown girl licked her lips and said, “This is not an issue of who is stronger. From your thought patterns alone, you cannot reach Gremlin.”

Immediately afterwards, the situation greatly changed.

Marian Slingeneyer and Kumokawa Maria both charged forward at once.

“Ah…?” as the brown girl charged in, she let out that slight voice of confusion.

Kumokawa Maria dove toward the ground like she was diving into a pool and “stepped” onto the ground with her hands.

“This is just a shogi problem.” Kumokawa Maria’s body twisted around and rotated while she was upside down. “You are not necessarily safe just by distancing yourself from the enemy pieces. The trick is to move to a position where the enemy pieces cannot move no matter how close it puts you!!”

The gold saw that Marian immediately swung passed by Kumokawa’s legs by only a few millimeters and her heel shot up toward Marian’s jaw. A dull noise rang out. She swung the gold saw and hammer again, but Kumokawa Maria’s legs were no longer there. The weapons merely flew through empty air.

“!!”

“Your vision was blurred and your brain rattled, so what do you think you’re following there!?”

With her hands still “standing” on the ground, Kumokawa Maria had folded up her legs as far as they would go. It looked like she was storing up all her strength like a spring, so Marian swung her upper body as far to the side as it would go with a creaking of her spine.

(Another shot is coming for my jaw!!)

“Is that what you thought? It looks like my pride is going to swell by quite a bit here!”

Kumokawa Maria spun her body while still upside down. Her legs wrapped around Marian Slingeneyer’s right leg.

That had been outside what Marian had expected.

With the threat of the gold tools, Kumokawa should not have been able to make that attack.

She had gone for something other than a blow.

She had used a locking technique.

Without knocking her opponent to the ground, Kumokawa Maria started to destroy Marian Slingeneyer’s right leg while the brown girl still stood.

A dull noise passed through Marian’s body and exploded in her head.

But before the bone was completely broken, Marian Slingeneyer swung down the gold hammer. Kumokawa did not stick around and instead let go with her legs and rolled backwards. Marian Slingeneyer tried to follow after her, but her right leg would not move properly. She lost her balance and had to lean against the wall.

“I didn’t get to the bone,” said Kumokawa Maria as she stood up by swinging her legs around like a break dancer and wiped nervous sweat from her brow. “But it looks like I did damage the tendon.”

“How could an uncategorized person with two arms and two legs do that…!?”

“Is four areas to strike from not enough for a decisive blow?” said Kumokawa Maria as she folded her spread arms.

It looked like she was defending her upper body, but it was actually a stance used for attacks with emphasis on the elbows.

“Then I will bring that up to 8 with my two elbows and two knees.”

“…!!”

"Have you calculated out just how much this expands my possible strategies?"

Kumokawa Maria forcefully kicked off the ground and charged straight for her. Eight striking points irregularly assaulted Marian Slingeneyer in a way that would be impossible for a normal martial artist.

The brown girl was not all that used to hand to hand combat.

Also, the tendon of her right leg was hurt, so she could not evade like she wanted.

However…

"It's true that I may be no match for you with no materials."

Marian Slingeneyer swung her gold saw. She was not aiming for Kumokawa Maria. She swung the tool in a large circle, damaging the floor, walls, and ceiling as it passed.

"*But I don't remember saying I have no other supplies of humans*."

They writhed. The people she had ordered to remain on standby while they had been transformed into the form of building materials scattered a great amount of yellow fat around the area. In what was like a stream from a high pressure water gun, metal pieces like nuts and bolts were fired like bullets.

Kumokawa Maria deflected them with her right fist, left elbow, and right knee. Using only the motion of her upper body, she avoided the gold hammer that came flying amid it all and then she charged straight in close to Marian Slingeneyer. She then pulled her head back in preparation.

"Nine!!"

Kumokawa Maria tried to swing her forehead down to knock the brown girl unconscious, but Marian swung her head to the side.

A new bolt shot from behind into the area Marian's head had been in.

The bolt struck Kumokawa Maria in the forehead, knocking her back where she collapsed to the ground.

She seemed to have received a concussion because she showed no sign of getting up.

"Was that all?"

Marian Slingeneyer cracked her neck. The saw had disappeared from her hand. This was simply because she had thrown it backwards. It had changed the form of one of the "obstacles" blocking up the passageway which is what had attacked Kumokawa.

As the brown girl walked, she still favored her left leg. Oumi Shuri had been unable to keep up with the battle and Marian kept her in the corner of her vision while she retrieved the hammer and the saw she had thrown.

As she did, she pulled out her smartphone and called Sigyn's number. While listening to it ring, Marian grimaced at the pain in her right leg.

"Dammit. I really need to learn when to play things a little more safe. I let my guard down because I thought she was a normal person. Agh, pick up already, Sigyn. If I have to deal with a Kihara without her 'advice', this could get to be a real pain in the ass."

But no longer how long she waited, Sigyn did not pick up. And then Marian Slingeneyer noticed something. While Oumi Shuri sat down on the ground, she was muttering something under her breath.

Marian's first thought was that Oumi Shuri had gone crazy.

However, that was not what was going on.

"Marian-chan…run…" Oumi Shuri's muttering had clear reason behind it. "Run from there. Right now. There is no guarantee that they are working alone. If reinforcements come, your right leg would be a major weakness. So get out of there right away and tape it up…"

The voice was different, but the inflection, intonation, frequency and location of the breaths, and most importantly the words themselves were familiar to Marian Slingeneyer.

"Sigyn…? What? Why are you mimicking her voice?"

She had heard Sigyn speaking on the phone earlier, but that was not enough to emulate her so exactly. Even if she could get the surface right, getting the contents right should have been impossible.

Which meant…

(Was the Sigyn I spoke with on the phone her as well…? No, the Sigyn on the phone was in a different place than her. But then…)

"You were faking your panic up to this point? Sigyn is already in your or your comrades' grasp?" said Marian Slingeneyer tentatively. "Did you hold a knife to her throat or add some kind of gimmick around her neck that activates with a remote signal to get her to speak to me? How many of our secrets have you gotten from—!?"

She bit her tongue partway through and could not finish her sentence.

“…!? …!!”

“*No. If this is all your supernatural powers let you do, they do not seem a worthwhile candidate to take in as part of the Kouga.*”

As she muttered, Oumi Shuri threw a small object she had pulled out of her pocket. With a wet noise, it stuck to the wall. It looked like a disposable teabag.

It took Marian Slingeneyer a bit to realize what it was.

“…Alcohol…?”

“It was around 70% alcohol by volume. It’s all referred to as ethyl alcohol, but the means of distillation greatly changes its properties. You could call this stuff a pro at getting you badly drunk. If you drank a straight glass of this, you would be able to wrestle an elephant. It was originally used by the ninja to throw pursuing dogs off the trail.”

“!!”

With her head reeling, Marian swung her gold saw at the nearby wall. She tried to remake a person who had become one with the wall into a spear and drive it into Oumi Shuri.

However, it did not activate.

She failed to alter the person. The spear she had supposedly created did not listen to her orders.

“Affecting you was just an added bonus,” said Oumi Shuri smoothly as she pulled out a gardening trowel-type kunai. “I used alcohol to get all of your hidden materials drunk. After all, that’s their weakness. Since you alter living humans, their human thought patterns are built into the weapon. For that reason, they will not alter like you want or follow your orders if they are drunk. *That’s the weakness Sigyn told me about.*”

“!!”

Marian Slingeneyer made a quick decision.

She turned around and immediately began to flee.

She was fleeing from someone she knew had no supernatural powers. She was running from someone she had ignored as too far below her for worry.

Cold words stabbed into Marian’s back as she ran favoring her left leg.

“Show me some supernatural powers more fitting of being included within the Kouga.”

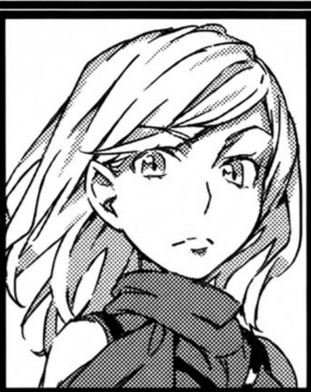
These were the words of the ninja that had survived to modern times.

These were the words of Oumi Shuri who appeared on the scene first with flashy movements.

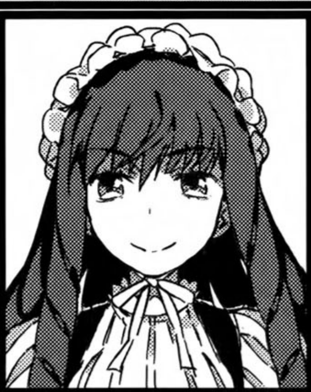
“*If you can’t, I will decide I have no more use for you*.”

Marian Slingeneyer could hear her pursuer approaching from behind.

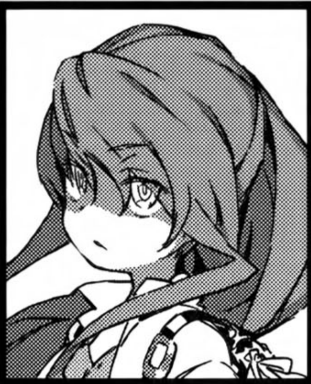
Key persons of “Baggage City”



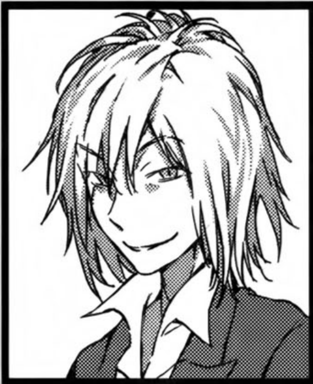
Natural Selector competitor
Saflee Opendays



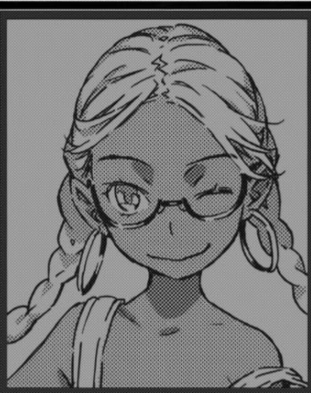
Academy City’s maid girl
Kumokawa Maria



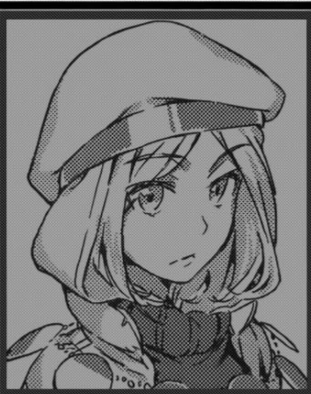
Natural Selector competitor
Oumi Shuri



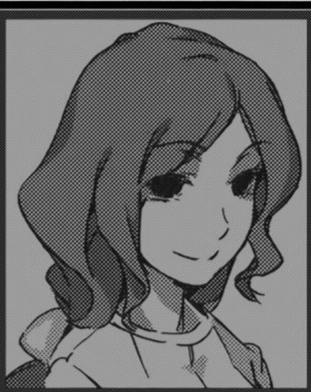
GREMLIN’s official member
Útgarða-Loki



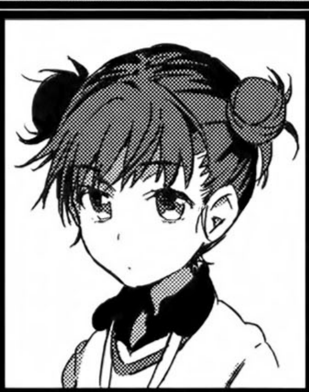
GREMLIN’s official member
Marian Slingeneyer



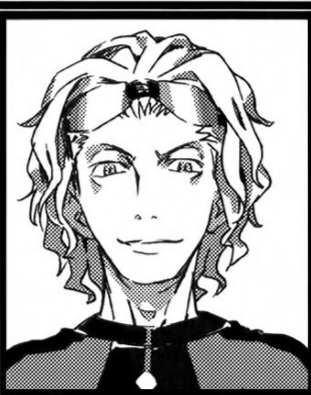
GREMLIN’s official member
Sigyn



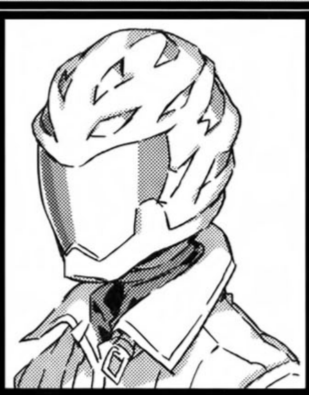
Kihara family
Kihara Byouri



Kihara family
Kihara Enshuu



Kihara family
Kihara Ransuu



Helmeted Man

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Key persons of “Baggage City”

PERIOD.21

The girl's hair was up in buns on either side and she wore a large sweater. She wore a miniskirt and black stockings. Other than the *precision equipment with small screens* such as a smartphone and a 1seg television hanging from a string around her neck, she was a completely plain girl with no characteristics that really stood out. Few people would believe that she was a member of the Kiharas that shook the world.

She was Kihara Enshuu.

The girl was almost always cowering and she had actually been judged as not qualifying as a Kihara. She was unable to form the characteristic Kihara thought pattern and she had shown no positive research that would allow her to continue as a Kihara.

"Hey, over here. Over here!"

"Byouri-obasan."

Hearing that familiar voice, Enshuu's face lit up. She was not aware that it was things like that that made her not "Kihara-like". The voice had come from within the garbage disposal facility, but Kihara Enshuu charged into the piles of stinking garbage without hesitation.

While a blackish liquid soaked into her clothes, she dug through the garbage and found a crushed wheelchair. When she dug further, she found the familiar face of a relative.

Kihara Byouri feebly smiled and said, "Ahh, I lost, I lost. Those outside of science really are something else."

After speaking, she weakly tapped at her own legs. They had been completely crushed and now looked like warped metal baseball bats. On top of that, the robot parts that assisted in moving her legs had sunk into her legs. If you put metal pipes and someone's legs in a press, you would likely end up with something similar.

"How could you lose, Byouri-obasan?"

"Don't ask me. Anyway, Enshuu-chan, could I borrow a communications device? I want to open a port to Academy City and perform a proper realignment."

"What are you using it for?"

"My wheelchair and leg assisting robot have been destroyed, so this is my only trump card left."

"I'm worried about your body."

"Just hurry up and give it to me."

When more strongly urged, Kihara Enshuu removed the smartphone from her neck. It was something of a trump card for her, but she did not hesitate in handing it over to someone else.

Kihara Byouri altered the settings of the smartphone a bit and pulled something like a ballpoint pen from her pocket. She unhesitatingly stabbed it into her crushed thigh, but no blood came out. The tip of the pen glowed a pale blue.

"Signal received. Beginning form change of the #2 Level 5 Dark Matter."

Academy City had seven Level 5s.

In the past, the #2 of those had suffered serious injuries in a battle with the #1 and had been literally ripped to pieces. Currently, those pieces were divided up and attached to a giant life support device that somehow managed to keep him alive.

However, whatever situation he was in, he was still a valuable research subject as long as his powers could be used. In fact, the Kiharas found it more convenient that he had almost no ego and would simply use his powers when the proper electrical stimuli were given.

"I thought it was built into the Dark Matter's body because there was a risk of losing control."

"It was. That is why I usually carry it around separate from my body as a piece of equipment. But if I worried too much about that kind of thing, I couldn't name myself a Kihara. It is because we Kiharas take these great steps forward that we are able to clear the way to such unprecedented levels of darkness☆"

A strange cracking sound came from Kihara Byouri's legs.

It sounded more like cracks running through plastic than it did anything that should be coming from flesh or bones.

Her legs that had been crushed and formless took shape forcibly from within. The remnant robot parts that had dug into the flesh and even the bone were pushed out of her body in the process. Dark red blood flowed out, but it stopped after a bit. It was as if the built up filth within her body was being expelled.

What were produced were beautiful legs without even a scratch on them.

The situation did make the use of the term beautiful seem out of place, though.

Protrusions that resembled blades or wings appeared from her knees and thighs as Kihara Byouri slowly stood up. She had removed the limiter from the portions of her legs made of Dark Matter. She had removed the limits usually in place to prevent it from eating into her normal flesh.

“Ransuu-chan’s fight with Útgarðа-Loki ended as a tie. And I was defeated by that…what was her name? Marian something or other, I think. Anyway, one loss and one draw is not a very Kihara-like result.”

“Oh, right. I saw something who seemed to be *Kagun-ojisan*.”

“…Kihara Kagun? I knew he had disappeared from Academy City, but what is he doing here?”

“This is a problem.”

“Oh, dear. You don’t need to be so worried. The Kiharas will likely never be gone from this world. Well, if humankind itself is destroyed, that’s another story.”

“What do you mean?”

“Enshuu-chan, you lack a certain Kihara-ness to you, so you may not be able to tell yet, but that’s the kind of thing us Kiharas are. Even if we are all called Kiharas, we come in many different forms, right? Noukan-chan is a golden retriever with arithmetic circuits externally attached and you replace your thought patterns with those of other Kiharas because those ideas cannot be reproduced with a simple AI. …Kiharas are not limited to the form of people nor must they be linked by blood.”

That evil that appeared when science lost its purity.

That evil that had distorted history many times in the past was the true essence of those that were Kiharas. The whole world already detested them, but they would never disappear. When the Kiharas disappeared, humanity would have abandoned all the humanity in its culture.

Currently, the main faction of the Kiharas that included Byouri and Enshuu was indeed a single bloodline. However, as the previous examples showed, that bloodline did not cover all of it. And even if the Kihara bloodline were to be wiped out, a different bloodline would take up the name Kihara.

No one had ever decided on these things; it had merely come about that way naturally.

And it would continue to be that way as long as people continued to rely on the benefits of science.

"So do not worry, Enshuu-chan. The Kiharas will only be defeated when all cultures are wiped from this planet. I doubt the opponent we are fighting here possesses the power to do that, so we will not lose. Whatever happens, we will win in the end. Simple, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is, Byouri-obasan. What will you do now?"

"I will destroy everything starting with what I know. That's how we always do things. First I will destroy this burnable garbage disposal facility used to heat the hot water and then I will find that Marian something or other and defeat her. All difficult problems can be solved by destroying one hurdle at a time."

"Okay, okay. *Then, I will help you*," said Kihara Enshuu in a very un-Kihara-like comment. She reached into her pocket and pulled out her treasure which was a photo showing a few members of the family. "Amata-ojisan, Ransuu-ojisan, Byouri-obasan, Therestina-obasan, Kagun-ojisan. Some of you are gone, but don't worry. If all the Kiharas work together, we can surely overcome any problem."

Hearing that, Kihara Byouri smiled. The word Equ.DarkMatter appeared in orange letters on the side of her legs.

While they were all in the category of Kihara, she felt no camaraderie for the others.

That was the proper Kihara way.

(Well, I would like to keep the finer points of controlling the Number 2 as my own personal technology.)

Kihara Byouri slowly approached the back that Kihara Enshuu had so readily shown to her.

While pretending to walk up beside her, she took her position for an attack of certain death.

(As I said, Kiharas come in many different forms. It is quite possible the loss of Kihara Enshuu will bring about a much more skilled Kihara.)

So she did not hesitate to go in for the surprise attack.

That white leg that was clearly created of something other than human flesh flew for Kihara Enshuu's neck like a guillotine faster than the speed of sound.

Immediately afterwards, Kihara Enshuu swung her upper body around unnaturally and easily avoided that attack of certain death.

The photograph she had been holding floated in the air.

"*Yes, yes. I understand, Amata-ojisan.*"

As the handheld device, the 1seg television, and smartphone clanked against her neck, an eerie light was emitted from them. Confusing graphs writhed in the screens and her eyes absorbed them.

"*When I say something like that, a Kihara would unhesitatingly go in for a surprise attack!!*"

"…Tch!! Even if you're inferior, I guess a Kihara is still a Kihara!!"

As she shouted, wing-like parts spread wide from Kihara Byouri's thighs. That way, she could carry out actions that would be impossible with only two arms and two legs.

Kihara Amata's thought patterns that were currently supporting Kihara Enshuu were primarily used to beat down a high level esper in a close quarters brawl. It was an effective strategy, but it of course had its weaknesses. Another Kihara would know how to exploit those weaknesses.

Kihara Enshuu grabbed the photo fluttering through the air between her index and middle fingers and then muttered something further.

"I understand, *Touma-oniichan*."

This time, a chill ran down Kihara Byouri's back. This was different. A possibility she had not expected had just bared its fangs. Her body froze in the fear only a Kihara could bring.

"*At a time like this, Kamijou Touma would do this*!!"

The thought patterns she had analyzed had not stopped at only Kiharas.

That announcement had been the worst one possible for someone of such great darkness as Kihara Byouri.

Kihara Enshuu mercilessly attacked with the very Kihara-like means of misusing good.

SUB.22

Kihara Kagun.

He was originally researching on the illusions that appear to people when they're about to die. During this process, he managed to research on how to stop a heart safely and how to restart a heart that was stopped safely. In terms of the outcome, he had the ability to revive people. But he was a man who was legendary even amongst the Kiharas because of his ability to control the number of times he could stop a person's heart.

No one could read into his personality from the outside.

Unlike most of the Kiharas, he never showed his real personality. Maybe this could be somewhat of a relief to this world. Those intoxicating thoughts of his were a form of curse. If those things were shown on the surface, it was likely that there would be a drastic change in the whole Academy City.

He was this kind of Kihara.

His thoughts, evil deeds, accomplishments, everything were undoubtedly the best.

Kihara Kagun had erased the record of becoming evil as part of a Kihara in his teens, but he suddenly stopped his research on near-death experience before he was twenty. The reasons were unknown (and speaking of which, even if it could be described, this man, who was outstanding even amongst the Kiharas, may not have his thoughts understood). Once he was asked whether there were other reasons, he simply said a single line,

(Even when I get the results, the price I had to pay doesn't match.)

What results? What price? They weren't clear about what he said. But because of these words, many other researchers of near-death experience got a negative impact. But even when ignoring this, other people managed to come up with some ordinary hypotheses.

In other words, did Kihara Kagun realize the value and weight of these lives he was manipulating?

Through countless experiments, the answer he sought became simpler. Or rather, in the simple process, the Kihara was worn out and malfunctioned.

One of the reasons supporting this baseless hypothesis was that Kihara Kagun, who abandoned his role as a researcher, chose a very boring and bland path of being a teacher.

If one flipped through the records, there would be evidence that Kihara Kagun had once taken part in the Student Keeper activity.

The Student Keeper was one of the safety measures of Academy City. The main aim was to send teachers to the dormitories of students to teach them and counsel them to prevent them from being unable to return to school life because they kept skipping class.

In fact, there were a total of 32 students, including both male and female, who went back to school because of this activity.

Most of the Student Keepers couldn't touch what was deep inside the students' hearts, yet a teacher alone broke the record.

It seemed that the way Kihara Kagun broke the wall in the hearts of the students became an urban legend. Amidst all sorts of conjectures, there was a saying that *they gave a metaphorical warning for students to get away from the Kiharas, the dangerous darkness in Academy City*.

As for Kihara Kagun, the moment that changed his fate was that spring 3 years ago.

He met a killer wielding a knife.

All they knew was that it was a boy, 17, 18 years old, who was erased from the records.

At that time, the lesson time for ordinary students overlapped each other, and there were a lot of students gathered outside the school. However, the Anti-Skill members who were in charge of safety couldn't take care of all the students in such a large place. The killer started to take action without hesitation, and Kihara Kagun was at a position closest to him.

And then, as the teacher who was secretly respected, he released the Kihara to protect the students.

He used both hands to grab onto the shovel in the flowerbed nearby and ran at the killer without hesitation. He used that slight shock to the jaw to impair the killer's consciousness, and gave him a hypnotizing-like effect. Using that moment, he attacked the killer who was completely defenseless.

Continuous hits of metal could be heard.

Through the pathologist's analysis, the killer's head had 5 areas that were dug in. As for the perfect cause of death that didn't give any pain, the pathologist muttered *was he reading a human's anatomy textbook as he killed?*

Kihara Kagun's hands were stained in blood as the Anti-Skill members accosted him to court. But the judge's verdict was that he was defending himself appropriately, so he was acquitted. He wasn't sued by the prosecutors, and his license as a teacher wasn't revoked.

However, Kihara Kagun never retook his position.

On the day the judge deemed him innocent, Kihara Kagun sent an email to the school about his resignation. His colleagues reached his apartment, only to find the place completely empty.

At that time, the students in the school all felt that Kihara Kagun was *a hero who ignored his own position to protect the students*. At that time, the teachers, his ex-colleagues felt that this was a decision he made to avoid being a target of admiration for having a way to kill.

From then on, Kihara Kagun vanished without a trace.

Nobody even knew whether he was in Academy City or not.

SUB.23

“Not enough at all.”

No one knew what Kihara Enshuu was counting as she continued to play with her 10 fingers. Her clothes were stained with waste and blood that was seeping out.

The smartphone that was hanging from her neck and the 1seg TV continued to show a complicated graph.

“*Un, un, yes. Sorry, Amata-ojisan. Yes, in this situation, the Kiharas would prepare a raincoat. To me, Byouri-obasan didn’t attack out of a sudden, and I expected her ambush already.*”

In fact, a third-party who was seeing the graph would most likely not understand what Kihara Enshuu was doing. On one hand, it looked like a conversation. But in fact, it wasn’t. What Kihara Enshuu got was merely an inspiration. And this inspiration that appeared in her head was a self-muttering of words that were rearranged in such a way that those named Kihara would definitely do this.

She continued to walk down to the underground passageway.

The garbage disposal facility of the waste treatment plant was destroyed, so the warming effect in Baggage City was drastically decreased. She was in the house too, but she was shivering in cold. If she left it like this, no matter whether it was inside or outside the house, it would all be frozen.

But this didn’t seem to be enough.

Numerous graphs added to her strong inspiration.

Telling her,

“*Yes, this isn’t like a Kihara at all, Amata-ojisan.*”

No efficiency.

No rationale.

“*It’s not like a Kihara to think of a strategy that anyone could think of!!*”

She moved through the underground passage and entered the high-level resort hotel. She went through the lobby where no guards were present, took the elevator, reached the highest level, and opened the door where the keyhole was destroyed. This was the remains of a battlefield, where Kihara Ransuu and Útgarða-Loki had fought.

The pile of papers were thrown all over the place. Even now, those two important people were still lying on the floor. However, Kihara Enshuu didn't mind at all. Actually, Enshuu felt really bothered about leaving the 'Kihara' Ransuu alone. But at this moment, she should prioritize her actions as a Kihara.

Even so, Kihara Enshuu's actions weren't exactly that important.

She took out a test-tube from her clothes and uncorked the rubber cap. She added white powder that was like a sugar-stick added in coffee and poured water in from a flask in the wide hotel floor. She gently shook the test-tube, and the test-tube showed a translucent corroded substance. The fluid froze like jelly.

It was just something she bought in a supermarket.

It was just ordinary agar. However, it had other uses besides being food.

It could be used as a cultivating base for microbes like viruses and bacteria.

"…I can get this in about 30 minutes."

Kihara Enshuu placed the test-tube with the cap opened into the coffee cup. Being barehanded, she was ready to use another cup to make instant coffee.

Kihara Enshuu wanted to create moldy air.

This was something Kihara Ransuu used when he scattered chemical substances. Enshuu was ready to use the agar to capture the mildew and cultivate it as her own weapon.

However,

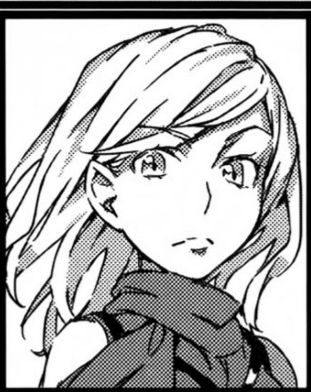
"*That's right, Amata-ojisan.*"

She held her cup with both hands. As she was worried about being scalded, she slowly drank the black liquid and waited for that moment.

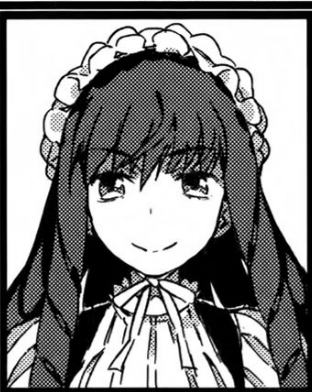
"*If the mold's genetic information mutates artificially, maybe it can become a biological weapon that can destroy Baggage City entirely.*"

There was more than one way to use a weapon.

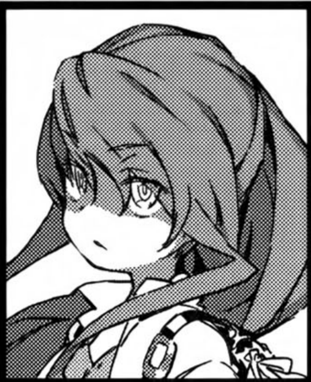
The Kiharas would create more fresh nightmares from these savage ideas.



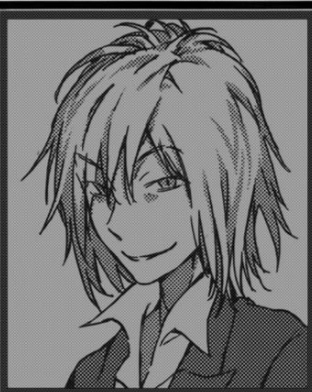
Natural Selector competitor
Saflee Opendays



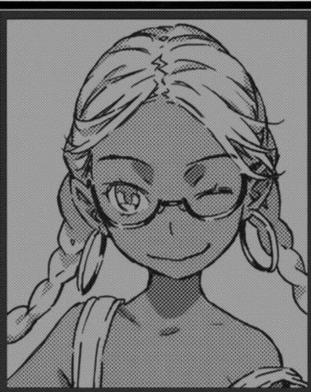
Academy City's maid girl
Kumokawa Maria



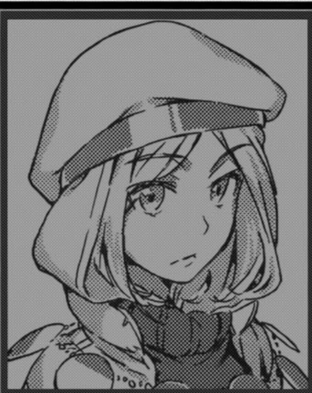
Natural Selector competitor
Oumi Shuri



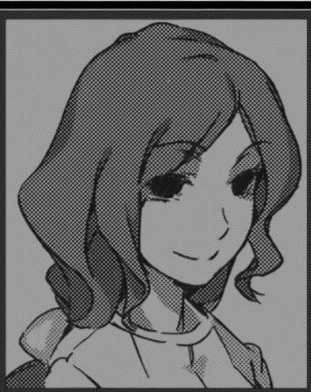
GREMLIN's official member
Útgarða-Loki



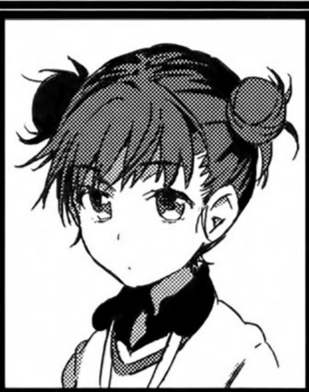
GREMLIN's official member
Marian Slingeneyer



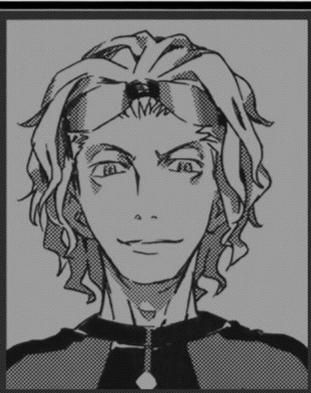
GREMLIN's official member
Sigyn



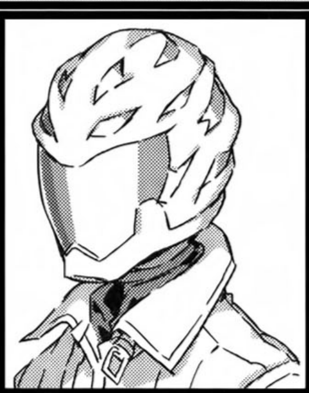
Kihara family
Kihara Byouri



Kihara family
Kihara Enshuu



Kihara family
Kihara Ransuu



Helmeted Man

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SUB.24

"Ack, argh!!"

Marian Slingeneyer used a hand to cover one eye and leaned on the wall beside the street. The reddish-black liquid continued to flow through the gap, and liquid of the same color was coughed out from her mouth. She didn't know the extent of the damage, but the huge impact had nearly caused her to lose consciousness. Right now, she was going through such pain.

Oumi Shuri.

Did I get careless because I felt that she wasn't of either science or magic side? Marian Slingeneyer was being pursued like this. As she could move in such a wide area, it was a coincidence that she met a 'talent'. She modified her golden saw and hammer into weapons and carried out a feint attack, and managed to escape as a result.

"…Damn it. I'm really suffocating now that my support, Sigyn, was eliminated. Or rather, the power of the Dáinsleif. One strike can destroy all, is it? I'm not battle-oriented though…"

It was unknown who actually modified who.

In the end, it became like this. She ended up having to run through the chaos to escape, and she didn't even have the self-belief that she managed to escape.

She walked into a shopping mall in the underground streets. It was unknown whether it was because of the chaos caused by the Kiharas and Academy City that there was no sign of customers or workers inside. It was unknown where they had gone, or even whether they were alive or not. But obviously, Marian Slingeneyer completely ignored this. She went to the pharmacy corner and looked for bandages and antiseptics.

Luckily, her eye didn't seem to have lost its vision. She wiped off the blood that flowed into her eye, and she managed to regain her vision slightly. As her eyelid was damaged, the blood flowed in too. Even so, it was better for her to get a piece of gauze over it.

"…My right leg… Perhaps it's better to do some taping here…?"

It was really reckless of her to endure the muscle pain caused by Kumokawa Maria's wrestling moves and even try to run away. Heavy pain came from her right foot. And worst of all, she felt her leg swelling already. Marian Slingeneyer took out some bandages from the box, clumsily rolled up her overalls' pants and exposed her knee.

Marian frowned as she looked at the rolled up bandage and again picked up the box that was placed aside to carefully look at the instructions written on the side.

"Damn it, what should I do now? Erm, use this to control the joint that's in pain…?"

Marian Slingeneyer could modify a completely healthy person into a table or a pillar, but she couldn't mend herself. This was just like the ones in charge of cooking and the ones in charge of critiquing the cooking. The skills they required were completely different.

Marian Slingeneyer clumsily used the tape to secure her knee before letting down the pants of her overalls and tried to move. The pain was more or less reduced, but she couldn't tell for now whether it was effective or not.

It seemed that there weren't any drugs that could immediately stop the pain, as Marian Slingeneyer scanned through the rack but couldn't find anything like that. She found a wet cloth, but she didn't know whether she should heat it up or cool it in this situation.

(…There are three of us that are thrown into this situation, including me. But Útgarða-Loki backed out already, and Sigyn isn't of any use here. In this situation, we have to purge them whether it's personal or for the organization. We don't know how many of the Kiharas are left, but the situation itself is really bad. The final survivor is me when I'm not even one of the main fighters?)

At this moment,

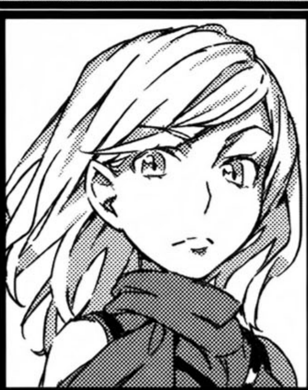
A rattling sound came from the exit to the pharmacy counter.

"…"

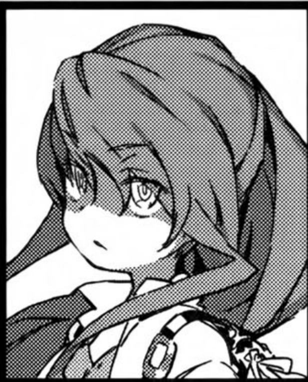
Marian Slingeneyer fluidly drew out the golden saw from her work clothes, but on seeing the other party's face, she immediately relaxed.

She actually smiled, and said,

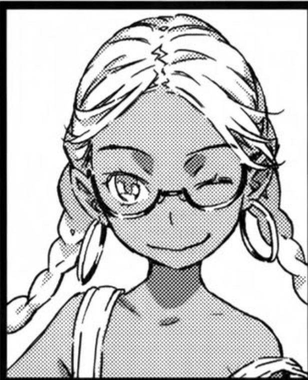
"Oi, what is it, Bersi? Don't you feel that the main action's about to begin soon?"



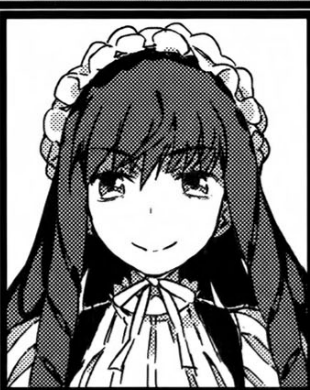
Natural Selector competitor
Saflee Opendays



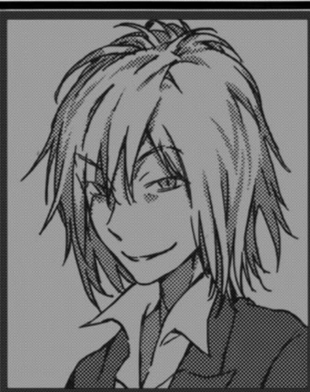
Natural Selector competitor
Oumi Shuri



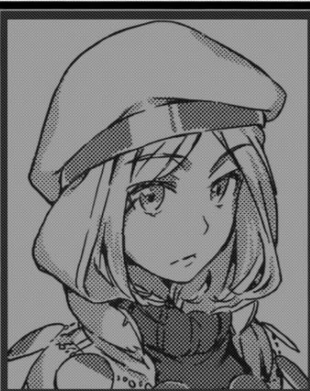
GREMLIN's official member
Marian Slingeneyer



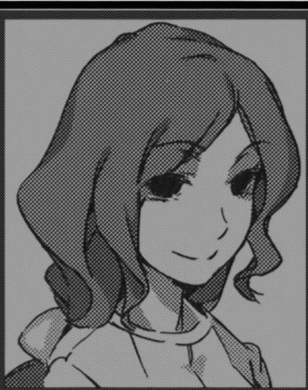
Academy City's maid girl
Kumokawa Maria



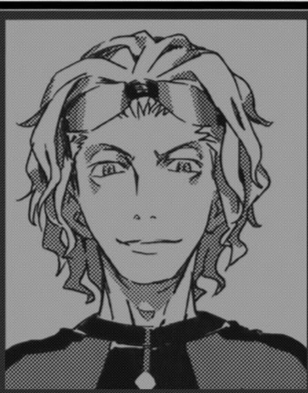
GREMLIN's official member
Útgarða-Loki



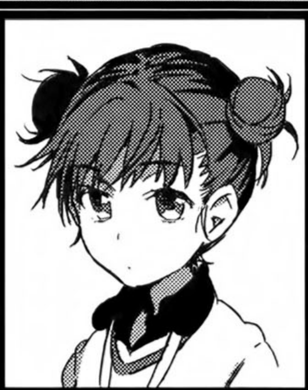
GREMLIN's official member
Sigyn



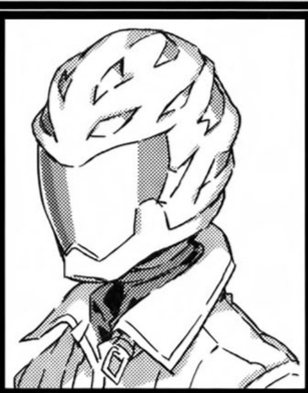
Kihara family
Kihara Byouri



Kihara family
Kihara Ransuu



Kihara family
Kihara Enshuu



Helmeted Man

CONFIDENTIAL
DOCUMENTS

SUB.25

"...What?"

The Anti-Academy City Science Guardians guard, the pawn Shar Berylan, continued to breathe out white breath as he looked around.

He was crouched outside the house, where the vending machine was all frozen. He had disguised himself as snow that fell from the roof, and then set up windshields around him as he tried his best to endure the cold. He wasn't trying to be like a snow hut, but amidst the aerated snow, it was obvious that a certain level of insulation could be achieved.

In such an environment of -20 degrees Celsius, this level of hard work was a must even when wearing a standard army uniform.

If he showed any signs of laziness, what awaited him would be an icy hell.

The road had a thermal warming installation to make the snow melt, but the communication links with the command post were severed. In this situation, he couldn't trust Baggage City's own security. This would be a more reliable way to ensure his own safety when he considered that countless cameras were installed in many areas as part of anti-crime measures, and that his actions may be observed by the enemy.

...Of course, as he thought about this, he forgot all about his utmost priority to defend Baggage City. Anyone could understand from this situation that he was merely thinking about how to survive in such an environment.

At this moment, Shar suddenly lifted his head.

His attention was divided by something external.

(...Why is it so quiet? That's strange.)

The sounds of battle were already long gone. This would most likely be evidence that one side achieved an overwhelming advantage. However, that wasn't all. This city lost the all-important buzzing that was supposed to be part of a city. There was no space for humans to survive. It was like ancient monuments on Mars.

It was completely empty.

And thus, everything was completely quiet.

Shar frowned, and soon had a doubt.

Where did the millions of residents in Baggage City go?

(…Did everyone escape outside? No, the nearest place people live would be more than 100km away. And it's impossible not to create any commotion when so many people are moving. We're not trying to play morals or pull shit or even run away from the guns of Academy City.)

Shar denied his own thoughts.

(Does that mean that Academy City killed everyone? No, that's not possible. We're talking about millions of people here. Even if it's killing those ordinary civilians that can't defend themselves, it will take lots of effort. The city's so quiet so quickly. This proves that the enemy couldn't possibly carry out some operation to eliminate a group.)

He couldn't be certain whether this was a good thing or not, but he didn't get any reply for now. It was like those critics who were watching from the other side of a river; there wouldn't be any constructive suggestions from criticism alone.

Shar Berylan pondered for a while, and finally crawled out from his self-made cover.

He didn't know what happened to the residents of Baggage City, but in fact, it was wrong to worry about their safety.

If one couldn't understand anything on the battlefield, there would be a certain level of mental disturbance. It was kind of unnerving to walk around like this when the situation was uncertain.

"…Orders from the higher ups. Letting the people evacuate and destroy all the large destructive weapons in the city; that's not possibly an order, is it?"

Shar made all sorts of somewhat suitable guesses, and then crawled forward silently in this quiet white street. There were no signs of enemies, allies, or even tourists. Maybe countless corpses were buried by snow under this snowy day.

After crawling about 50m away from his self-made cover, he got new intel.

Shar caught sight of the enemy, and then leaped into an alley between buildings where there was relatively less snow piled up, using the vehicle that was parked there. He was hiding at the back of a truck that used natural gas, where the danger would be at its maximum, but in this situation, he was unable to change his location.

Right in front of him was a cross-junction where no vehicles were moving, and 4, 5 soldiers were standing there.

After checking that their guns and clothing weren't equipment that he was used to seeing, Shar concluded that they were soldiers on Academy City's side. In other words, enemies.

They were holding an object that looked like a beachball, and the base looked like a hair spray.

(…Support Balloon?)

Shar, who once borrowed (or rather, snatched?) Academy City's manufactured weapon, had an impression of this. In other words, it was an intel weapon that was relatively simple in design. It was less like a small block full of technology than an idea of a product that would be even more attractive.

The exterior looked like a helium balloon that was released with a camera attached to it, and it was kept in the air to retain visuals; it was basically that kind of weapon. It was something that was used to make up for weaknesses in areas where the blessings of satellites and recon planes couldn't be reached. The effect would last for about 30 minutes. It would continue to fly up once it was released. And even if it was left untouched, it would be splattered sooner or later due to air pressure. However, it was just that kind of a thing.

There was a timer attached to the hair-spray-shaped cylinder object at the bottom to detect the location of the soldiers on the ground from where the balloon would float. The estimated time on the timer would cause it to explode at a certain time… But Shar could tell that Academy City intended to suppress Baggage City from the fact that they were using such a thing.

Shar didn't have the pride left to grit his own teeth painfully.

As for what he was worried about…

(They have declared that the suppression's over, but what exactly are they looking for?)

The initial Support Balloon was something that was to be used as support to make up for weaknesses in areas where there were no satellites or recon planes. But from the fact that Baggage City was controlled by Academy City, they wouldn't have the need to deliberately set a Support Balloon.

However, Academy City's forces were using the Support Balloon.

It seemed like they were searching for something that satellites and recon planes couldn't find, and even set even more cameras and sensors at its base.

What exactly was the thing they were pursuing such that such measures were warranted…?

"Maybe there's something even these people can't find? They couldn't even find the millions of people in Baggage City."

He was shocked, but that was all.

The number of cameras and sensors continued to increase. Sooner or later, they would be able to discover Shar’s location.

He slowly left the natural gas truck, abandoned his old cover and looked for the next hiding place.

Something seemed to be mocking the almost-perfect Academy City.

And the targets weren’t soldiers that were trained professionally, but millions of ordinary people.

Shar was somewhat impressed by them.

“…If that’s the case, I really hope that they share some of this grace with me.”

Shar trod over the pile of snow, and his profile slowly disappeared into the corners of the streets.

The pile of snow on the road continued to gather, which showed that the thermal effect was gradually weakening. But right now, he did not have time to think too much about that.

The streets were completely quiet, and this silence brought about a more unnerving presence.

SUB.26

"Oww…"

Kumokawa Maria slowly sat up while holding her head in one hand.

She was no longer in the underground passageway where she had passed out. She was on an examination table in what looked like a doctor's office. It must have been a facility related to Natural Selector.

"Oh, are you up?" asked a female voice.

Kumokawa Maria looked up to see a woman dressed in a showy dress standing surprisingly nearby. She had blonde hair, blue eyes, and white skin. She was good looking enough to become a model, but Kumokawa Maria could see exceptional muscle tone underneath her skin.

"…Where am I? And what happened?"

"I found you collapsed in a hellish passageway and carried you to this medical room. I don't know the details and I'm not sure anyone does."

"Who are you?"

"Saflee Opendays."

Kumokawa heard a rustling sound from the corner of the room. A small girl was packing ice in a plastic bag. Next to her was a very strange large man. He was over 2 meters tall and he was decorated with various types of antennae.

"I am a Natural Selector contestant. I'm not a Kihara or from Gremlin; I only have a supporting role. By the way, that pretty young girl is Mistray Flakehelm and the street performer next to her is her father Osad Flakehelm. After I saved them, I couldn't bring myself to just abandon them, so I decided to play a more leading part."

"And so you rescued me as well. That really hurts my pride," said Kumokawa Maria self-deprecatingly. "There should have been a child-like older woman carrying a school bag in that passageway. Did you see her?"

“A child-like older woman? Is that some kind of riddle?” Saflee frowned. “No one else was there. But from the destruction left on the passageway, it looked like someone had chased after someone else. I gave priority to the injured person right in front of me, though.”

“…”

Kumokawa Maria narrowed her eyes, but Saflee’s next words were not what she had expected.

“Oh, but a child-like older woman, you say? That’s a little hard to picture, but was the shorter one a friend of yours? Then you don’t need to worry.”

“?”

“From what I could see, the short one chased the tall one away.”

“???”

Did that mean Oumi Shuri was still alive?

“You need to worry about yourself more than the winner. We need to figure out what we are going to do from now on.”

“…”

Kumokawa Maria fell silent at that.

Oumi Shuri was continuing the fight for her own reasons.

Then what about Kumokawa herself?

What would she do now?

She had come to Baggage City in pursuit of Kihara Kagun. She had intended to head through a world that had strayed from the proper path in order to find out the truth about the death he had caused. However, when the darkness had opened its maw, it had been so deep and dark that Kumokawa Maria’s common knowledge no longer got her anywhere. It was like being forced to take part in a board game without being taught the rules.

That was the world of the Kiharas.

Or perhaps it was the world that should be opposed with the Kiharas.

The girl named Mistray Flakehelm handed her the plastic bag filled with ice and Kumokawa Maria placed it against her forehead. The comfortable cold spread across the bruise, but she noticed something else. Something was wrong.

“You just realized how cold you are, didn’t you? And that you can see your breath.” Saflee Opendays gave a small smile. It looked as if she was forcing it. “Of the heating facilities that are Baggage City’s lifelines, the garbage disposal facility and oil refinement plant have been destroyed. The Anti-Academy City Science Guardians are desperately defending the last source of heat, the thermal power station, but it’s probably already too late. That much heat is not enough for all of Baggage City.”

“Who did that…?”

“The Kiharas. We keep hearing that term over the radio we stole.”

That name caused Kumokawa Maria’s heart to jump.

But then she calmly thought about the crisis unfolding.

“Their higher ups will give themselves priority I’m sure. They won’t care if everyone else freezes over. That is of course if those higher ups are even still alive,” said Saflee.

A few percentage points of the soldiers were still active, but they were in a complete panic, so they would unlikely be much help. They were just barely managing to hide, so coming into contact with the soldiers also held the risk of drawing their real enemy to them. For that reason, they hesitated to call out to those soldiers.

“Freezes over, hm?”

It was below -20 degrees outside. Even if the buildings were protected by thick insulation, the inside of the buildings would be the same after half a day without heat. That would cause major damage to all those still alive in Baggage City.

“By the way, there is a surprisingly simple means of solving the heat problem.”

“?”

“It’s a method used in Nordic areas. The heat of all the people in busy stations is used to heat a different building. It’s used for buildings in Arctic regions. Together, the residents of Baggage City and the spectators number in the millions. If they are all gathered in one of the domed facilities, their own heat could save their lives.”

“That sounds like it would only work for so long, but I guess it would help us endure,” muttered Kumokawa Maria.

But there was a problem.

“But the ones who created this battlefield wouldn’t allow it. If all those people gathered in one place, wouldn’t they attack them?”

"Yes. And not for any tactical or logical reason. They would probably just blow them all away for fun," agreed Saflee. "So that method will be of no use as a means of passing time without having to fight the major bosses. In fact, it can only be used to buy time for rescue to come after we have already defeated all of those major bosses."

"Which means…"

"Our time limit is about half a day. We must defeat all the major bosses rampaging through Baggage City in that time. If we do not, millions of people will become frozen food. Do you understand the situation?"

"It sounds to me like this solves nothing."

"Just by having this half a day for pure fighting is quite lucky. Normally, we would end up frozen whether we won or lost."

Kihara and Gremlin. They had no idea if they could defeat even one of them, and they had to defeat all of them. Those conditions simply sounded insane. However, the only other option was to have everyone in Baggage City freeze to death by normal means.

Kumokawa Maria let out a small sigh and said, "So we have to do it even if it's impossible. It looks like the time has come to test the strength of my pride that just keeps getting damaged."

"Yes, yes. By the way, I thought you might be the type to know how to use her fists, but do you think you can be of any help?"

"Either way, I'm headed to same direction you are."

Kumokawa Maria nodded in response to Saflee's question.

She would pursue Kihara Kagun. After experiencing that hell, she was even more determined than ever to do so. He had not stepped into that hell without knowing what it was as Kumokawa Maria had. Kihara Kagun had clearly known exactly what he was getting himself into.

Back then.

Back there.

What exactly had happened? And how had it led to this hell? Until she knew that, Kumokawa Maria would not back down.

Meanwhile, Saflee gave voice to her current goal.

"Our first target is someone named Kihara Enshuu."

"…Kihara?"

"Yes. Apparently, a different Kihara brought in some kind of mold used for combat and this Kihara Enshuu is trying to use it. By causing artificial changes to it, she is increasing its infectiousness and toxicity and then will spread it as a biological weapon."

"And get herself wrapped up in it too?"

"I know. I really don't want to know her reason."

"…"

Artificially altering microbes.

The term sounded like something out of a movie, but it was really not that difficult a thing to do. Everyone was familiar with the changes the influenza virus went through every year.

Microscopic life forms underwent changes to their genetic structure due to external causes relatively easily.

However, making changes to the parts you wanted in order to produce the effects you wanted was decidedly more difficult.

Kumokawa Maria brought her hand to her jaw and said, "But mold is a living thing. It needs heat to remain active. It seems like bringing down the temperature to make us suffer would run counter to this."

"She is killing anyone she can by dropping the temperature. She will only spread the mold once the heat has gone back up enough for it to be active. That way, she can kill as many people as possible. Mold in the bath can be quite persistent. The same goes for athlete's foot. It stops being active in a difficult environment, but that does not kill it. After hibernating for a long period of time, it can reactivate once the environment is more favorable."

"But Baggage City doesn't have any specialized microbe research facilities. At least none it advertised. Unless some new conspiracy shows itself, I would assume she is going to misuse a civilian facility."

"That's exactly right. It seems Kihara Enshuu is headed for the plant factory. Y'know, those container shaped things. It's a new type of field that grows vegetables by using light with a special wavelength to induce photosynthesis, conditions the air to keep the temperature right, and soaks the roots in nutrients. Using it, you can pick the crops about 30 times in a year."

“I see,” muttered Kumokawa Maria in annoyance. “So does it use ultraviolet light in place of the sun? That’s the same reason the genetic information of the influenza virus is damaged every year.”

“Could this be bad?”

“Very bad,” she replied simply. “By the way, if you don’t even have that kind of fundamental knowledge on the subject, how could you tell what Kihara Enshuu is planning? You don’t seem to have what it takes to build up to that conclusion.”

“Oh, to be honest, I was given this advice by someone else.”

“Who?”

“A man wearing a helmet and a coat.”

This time, Kumokawa Maria completely froze.

“Was it *Kagun-san*? Well, I doubt he told you his name.”

SUB.27

“It’s so cold,” said Kihara Enshuu meaninglessly in a high-pitched voice.

While shrinking down in the cold blizzard, she trudged forward through the thick snow. She was in a city surrounded by concrete, but she felt like someone stranded in a mountain.

In one corner of Baggage City, rectangular containers were piled up like toy building blocks. The area had originally been a large parking lot, but no sign remained of that. The countless containers gave it a cramped feeling.

Rather than long narrow rectangular solids, the containers were a smaller size meant to be carried by railroad. The main difference from normal containers was the business use electrical plugs attached to the side. They were not boxes meant to hold things. They were devices used to grow vegetables within.

They were plant factories.

“Hmm. I wonder if they were gathered here during the war so they could be sent to various battlefields to help with the food supply. After all, they can be harvested from 30 times in a year. But the war ended too quickly and they just ended up being put to civilian use here.”

Obviously, growing vegetables in a snowy Arctic area like Baggage City was not easy, so the cuisine focused on meat. The plant factories had a plain but definite benefit for the residents of Baggage City.

Kihara Enshuu reached out toward the metal door of one of those saviors.

She had the materials for the biological weapon in her clothes.

“Huh?”

A rattling noise came from the door.

It would not open. The lever holding it shut would not move.

“I guess it’s locked. Are they protecting their food?”

With a quizzical look, Kihara Enshuu turned around.

She then headed for the security room the keys were likely kept in.

◆

Ayles Bigant trembled within a small room.

He had originally come to Baggage City as a participant in the Natural Selector tournament, but everything had been destroyed on the first day of the tournament. Unknown monsters had attacked the city. However, fleeing out into the streets only dumped you into a hell of -20 degrees and the nearest city was 130 kilometers away.

That meant he had no choice but to hide somewhere in Baggage City. His only choice was to hide and wait for the police or army to come and resolve the situation.

That had been his plan, but the doorknob had suddenly started to shake. No, it was the entire door. The metal door did not open, but it was enough to make Ayles tremble. The person had not knocked or tried to turn the knob. They had simply started kicking at the door or something equally as violent.

“Shit. What is going on? What!? Shit!!”

Still crouched down on the floor, Ayles Bigant grabbed a semi auto shotgun with trembling hands. He was so panicked that he had forgotten to do something as basic as loading the first bullet, so it would not fire even if he pulled the trigger.

Someone had noticed him.

He had finally been caught.

It did not really matter who it was. Being found by anyone was a problem. Even if it was an old person seeking help and who had no connection to the overall incident, that meeting could still lead to the people behind it all finding out he was there.

Having nothing happen was ideal.

Not coming into contact with anyone was safest.

And yet this was happening.

That meant…

“It doesn’t matter who it is.” Holding the shotgun, Ayles slowly and silently stood up. “I will eliminate any threat.”

◆

Kihara Enshuu came to the edge of the parking lot filled with container-shaped plant factories. Something like a prefab storage building was there, but the door would not open no matter how many times she kicked at it.

"From the noises I can hear, I think someone is inside," the girl muttered before removing the smartphone from around her neck.

She switched out the smartphone's case with something that had a suction cup on it and stuck the smartphone to the center of the door.

"*Yes, yes, that's right. A Kihara would do a bit more, Amata-ojisan.*"

Kihara Enshuu activated an application and then looked around.

A few large cranes were parked about. They were likely used to move the piled up container-shaped plant factories.

◆

Who was there?

It was clear someone was.

Still holding the shotgun, Ayles Bigant gulped audibly. A strange sense of intimidation pressed at him from the door. He wanted to go ahead and pull the trigger, but he also saw the thin door as his final fortress. He felt that he would lose everything if he destroyed it himself and he wanted absolute assurance that he would kill whoever it was if he did destroy the door.

Suddenly…

"…?"

He heard footprints in the snow. The sound got progressively smaller so it must have been getting progressively more distant. Had the person not realized someone was inside? Were they leaving? As soon as Ayles Bigant had that thought, he frantically cast aside that hopeful view.

The answer would not be that simple in that hell.

The reality was likely much more cruel.

For example, the person could have been leaving to call in more people.

It would be best if he assumed that sitting there and doing nothing would lead to him being surrounded by a large group.

“Fuck!!”

Ayles Bigant adjusted his grip on the shotgun and frantically headed for the door. If the person was leaving, it was possible their back would be facing him. In that case, even if the person was a monster, he had a greater chance of winning with a shotgun blast.

Even so, he was not so foolish as to suddenly open the door.

The door had a peephole in it.

♦

“Hm hm hmm hm hm hm.”

While humming, Kihara Enshuu poked at one of the devices hanging from her neck with a finger. Something was vaguely displayed on the smartphone stuck to the door.

It was an Echo Filter.

The device allowed her to see beyond obstacles using ultrasonic waves. Basically, it was the same as the devices used to see a pregnant woman’s baby but with a strengthened output. The idea was an old one and applied research into using it in counter terrorist operations had been performed in the past. Unlike with the fiber scope used for endoscopes, no hole had to be opened in the door or wall. However, the vague images made it difficult to tell who was the terrorist and who was the hostage, so it had gone for many years without ever becoming widely used.

The smartphone displayed what was on the other side of the door.

A vague form was approaching.

He was pressing up against the door.

He was peering through the peephole.

“Hmm hm hm hm hmm.”

Kihara Enshuu smiled while watching his movements to get the timing right as she tapped at the device around her neck.

The time came.

However, Kihara Enshuu took no showy actions.

She merely pulled the smartphone from the door and lay down on the snow.

Immediately afterwards, something large approached.

♦

Ayles Bigant had made a few errors. For one, he had not counted on the existence of the Echo Filter that showed the person on the other side everything within the security room. The other had been about the footsteps he had heard. His interpretation of the gradual lowering in volume had been that the source of the noise was receding.

In reality, it could just as easily been the volume of the device outputting the noise being lowered.

Due to this, Ayles had assumed that whoever it was was no longer right next to the door.

Inside the small room, his sources of visual information were limited.

Without information, he was uneasy.

He tried to put himself at ease by gaining some information.

The auditory information of the slowly disappearing footsteps had shown him just how starved for information he was. It was like the delicious smells coming out to the street from a restaurant's kitchen.

That was why Ayles Bigant's face had been naturally sucked in toward the peephole. He wanted to remedy that starvation. He had no idea that he was being led to do just that by someone.

"?"

Immediately afterwards, a great dull noise pierced through the thick door.

♦

"That should do it," muttered Kihara Enshuu as she lay flat atop the snow. She had controlled a crane remotely. The plant factory container hanging from the wire had been swung like the giant metal ball used in building demolitions. The heavy plant factory had passed right above Kihara Enshuu as she lay on the snow and slammed into the door.

The door and the surrounding wall had been blown away.

The steel door was buried into the opposite wall and a dark red liquid was flowing out from the gap between the door and the wall. She never even heard a scream.

“Wow, this is a messy room. It even has building materials scattered about.”

Kihara Enshuu entered the cramped security room and grabbed a ring of keys from the wall.

“Uuh…” came a groan.

It seemed the source of the dark red liquid was still moving.

Kihara Enshuu looked around the crushed room, used one hand to grab a shotgun that was on the floor for some reason, and loaded the first bullet with a quick motion.

“…”

A dull noise struck the door.

She tossed the shotgun aside and exited the room that now had nothing left moving.

“*It pains me, but I have to do this kind of thing if I am to be a Kihara. Right, Amata-ojisan*?”

She trudged through the blizzard and opened the door to a random container. The inside was lined with steel racks. Each rack had cabbages lining it and red and green lights lit up the area.

“Oh… It’s filled with LED lights. But I need a black light to cause the changes in the mold.”

She searched around for a bit and finally found what she was looking for. They were fluorescent lights only about as along as chopsticks. However, they were blue. They were black lights that emitted ultraviolet rays.

Kihara Enshuu gathered a few black lights and placed them at complicated angles. She then delicately adjusted the balance by using a photometer that used the camera on her smartphone.

The genetic information of microscopic life forms was easily damaged.

They had almost no defense against ultraviolet rays or cosmic rays.

However, it was incredibly difficult to use that to get a desired result.

“Now then…”

Kihara Enshuu grabbed a cabbage from a random rack and lightly munched on it. She immediately regretted it due to how bitter it was.

“*Hmm, at this output, it should take about an hour. Right, Amata-ojisan?*”

SUB.28

Kumokawa Maria and Saflee Opendays left the domed facility the medical room had been in and entered the white. Instead of feeling the cold stab into their skin, it felt more like a pain tearing through their skin.

“Ow,” said Saflee.

“What is it?”

“It’s something like a paper airplane. Is it supposed to be like the letter on an arrow that the Japanese ninja use? Toryahh!”

While Kumokawa frowned in confusion, Saflee tossed the paper airplane back in the direction it had come from.

Saflee looked up into the sky in annoyance and said, “Minus 20 degrees… How long can we last dressed like this?”

“Just think of it like being in a giant refrigerator. After about 30 minutes, we’ll pass out, and after an hour, our lives will be in danger.”

“So Kihara Enshuu can’t last long either?”

“If she has some kind of countermeasure, who knows how long she can last. Don’t forget that she is the one that set things up like this.”

The plant factories were not all that far away. The container-shaped plant factories had been piled up in a parking lot connected to the domed facility. It had no giant fixed cranes like at a port, so it mainly used truck-mounted cranes and forklifts.

It was easy to picture in one’s head, but the scale was overwhelming upon actually seeing it.

“There are hundreds of them.”

“I hate how I can’t even guess how many there are. This is gonna hurt my pride.”

“?”

“Kihara Enshuu is using ultraviolet rays to destroy the genetic information and turn this special mold into a biological weapon. But how many samples does she have? If she divided them into multiple containers and is performing the process in parallel, we need to destroy all of those. I would bet she did just that to have some insurance against failure.”

“So we don’t even know how many we have to destroy?” Saflee clicked her tongue in annoyance. “We may have to start thinking on the scale of destroying all of the containers,”

“Yeah, maybe so. If we just try to guess the correct containers, we would run out of time.”

Saflee had only been speaking out of self-derision, so she was surprised when Kumokawa actually took the idea seriously.

“No, no, no! There are hundreds of them! I don’t know how long it would take to create this biological weapon, but it would take a day or two to destroy all of them!!”

“I never said we had to crush them individually like empty cans.” Kumokawa Maria waved her index finger back and forth. “These plant factories run on electricity. The lights, air conditioning, and circulation of the nutrient liquid have to keep going 24/7. A car battery isn’t going to cut it. They must be drawing electrical power from an external source. Each and every one has to do that.”

When used on the battlefield, they likely had solar panels to generate power, but there was very little sunlight in that snowy area. They needed to be connected by cables.

“Then…”

“We have our answer. It looks like my pride can swell once more. If we destroy this external power source, the black lights emitting the ultraviolet rays will all stop! Kihara Enshuu will be unable to complete her biological weapon!!”

Kumokawa Maria looked around the area. To avoid disconnections due to the weight of the snow, there were no power lines supported by poles. The power cable must have run below ground.

Saflee clicked her tongue and said, “I guess this won’t be that easy. Should we head back underground?”

“No…”

Kumokawa Maria approached one of the plant factories in the pile. She carefully read what was written in the alphabet on the surface.

"The power unit takes 300 volts and 50 amps. That's a fairly specialized current. It's different from both Japan and Baggage City's household power. Maybe it's some kind of military format."

"Don't expect me to understand any numbers that have nothing to do with protein content."

"It means the power can't be used directly taken from the power lines. Most likely, there is a transformer facility somewhere around here. If we destroy that, all of the plant factories should stop running!!"

The girl in the maid uniform looked around the area and spotted an area surrounded by a fence in the white scenery. The area was about 10 meters square. Inside, a few vending machine-like objects were lined up.

"That's the transformer facility!!" shouted Kumokawa Maria.

At that same moment, the door to one of the containers at the surface was kicked open from the inside.

A girl with a smartphone, a 1seg television, and such devices hanging from her neck exited holding a can of black tea between her two hands.

"Yes, if you think a bit, that weakness is obvious," she said in a troubled voice.

Saflee lightly grabbed Kumokawa Maria's clothes.

"(Hey, since she came out of there, is that container…?)"

"(Whether it's one of the correct ones or not, it's still more definite if we destroy the transformers to stop all of them.)"

"So you get it. If you had just destroyed this one and felt satisfied with that, I would have won." Kihara Enshuu shrank down and warmed herself with the can of tea. "But since you know how important the transformers are, I have to come out and counterattack."

"I'd say we're the ones counterattacking."

"*Yes, yes, that's right. I understand, Amata-ojisan.*"

Kihara Enshuu started speaking to someone else.

The smartphone and 1seg television around her neck displayed one strange graph after another.

"*Now that things have gotten like this, I cannot avoid fighting!! Unfortunately, very, very unfortunately, that is what a Kihara must do! I must smash them to pieces!!*"

Saflee clicked her tongue, dropped her center of gravity slightly, and took a ready stance.

“Here she comes! Are you ready to fight a monster!?”

“I’m so ready I have to correct you. She isn’t coming here. I’m headed for her!!”

The three clashed within the -20 degree blizzard.

Meanwhile, the countdown continued until the biological weapon left by Kihara Ransuu was ready.

SUB.29

Kihara Enshuu was said to lack a certain Kihara-ness even as a member of that family.

Her early life stood out in a way even among the Kiharas.

It was because of the ordinary people.

It was because of those claiming to be on the side of justice.

Those people took Kihara Enshuu away when she was very young. They did not do anything to her. All they did was imprison her in a dark room with no exit.

Kiharas became Kihara-like because they were taught by other Kiharas.

If the young Kihara Enshuu was taken away from the other Kiharas while learning all the basic knowledge of being human such as language and customs, she might turn out to be something other than Kihara-like. That was the thought process.

In reality, that was nothing more than the justification someone gave for the clichéd revenge they took out of jealousy of the Kihara family that continued to create genius after genius no matter how twisted they might be.

He did not kill her.

He did not even cause her pain.

He merely threw her into a room and let time pass without teaching her anything. This way, the person could fulfill his twisted desire to be smarter than a Kihara.

Kihara Enshuu could not perform the multiplication table and she could not write even katakana, much less kanji.

It had nothing to do with being smart or stupid. She simply was not taught those things.

That was how it was supposed to go.

However, that childish revenge was overturned before long. One day, when the person was bringing food to the dark room like usual, the person discovered some scribblings written on the walls and floor. They were much more than just the multiplication table or katakana. They were incredibly complex collections of equations written in a strange code that Kihara Enshuu herself had developed. The person was only intelligent enough to wish to raise his position in the world by holding back others, so he never learned that it was a proof of the foundational ideas behind a cold sleep device.

If the person had not been an idiot, he may have noticed other things as well.

The three crayons seemingly scattered on the floor actually created a beauty that completely outdid the golden ratio. The wrinkles in the seemingly crumpled up balls of paper actually showed the plans for a parallel processing chip. The shadows cast on the floor by the light from the floor lamp functioned as a new form of test to show the deep psyche of anyone who looked at them.

No acquired knowledge was needed for a Kihara to be a Kihara.

Just by being a Kihara, a Kihara would love the concept of science with all his or her being.

For one thing, science was not merely something in text books. It was not merely something taught by one’s parents or teachers. Science was what made up all that existed in the normal world. As such, Kihara Enshuu had had countless things to learn from. Reference materials were piled up around her. The dust floating in the room and the feel of the plastic cup gave Kihara Enshuu plenty of knowledge. The only way to take science from a Kihara would be to destroy the entire world, leaving nothing behind.

The incompetent person never realized that.

Without being taught by anyone, the much too competent Kihara Enshuu continued to play with science.

She did so as much as she wanted.

In fact, without having anyone teach her the border between good and evil, she naturally gravitated for the most evil and pure form of it.

“It just came to me.”

That was why Kihara Enshuu gave a carefree smile to the person who brought her food. She knew very well what would happen to him if she carried out her idea, but she did not hesitate.

On the other hand, she had never felt displeased with being imprisoned in that dark room. (She could draw out countless bits of new science from a drop of water, so she felt no need for external information sources such as school, friends, TV, or the internet.)

She felt no hatred toward that person and his childish revenge. (She had enough toys in that dark room to play for her entire life, so she had no reason to hate him.)

She merely wanted to show off what she could do with the inspiration around her. (She had never been taught how to properly contact a benefactor and may not have even understood what one was.)

She paid no heed to the fact that she was at the overwhelming disadvantage with the chains around her ankles. (To her, they were not restraints; they were just another toy.)

"I thought up a wonderful way of destroying this prison."

She carried it out perfectly.

It was an absolute success.

The chains that should have never broken from the strength of a young girl broke as if they had melted.

The person had no idea what she had done.

However…

When the person's body was discovered later, all but the head had been transformed into something like wax and his expression was one of extreme regret.

As if he had realized that the one he had been holding back so much had still risen far, far above him.

◆

Kihara Enshuu lacked something as a Kihara.

By supplementing that from without, she somehow managed to keep up with the Kiharas.

However, her information source was not merely the graphs that analyzed the thought patterns of others.

Her true field lay elsewhere

Even if she was immature and did not always succeed in it, Kihara Enshuu was still a Kihara.

MAIN.30

Kumokawa Maria and Saflee Opendays unhesitatingly charged toward Kihara Enshuu. Amid the white blizzard, countless graphs flashed across the smartphone and 1seg television hanging from Kihara Enshuu's neck and she shook the can of black tea by shaking her entire body back and forth as she held it in her hands.

"Minus 20 degrees. Minus 20 degrees. La la la."

Three meters.

Only a large step away.

Kihara Enshuu unhesitatingly tossed the contents of the can toward them.

"!!"

"!?"

Saflee frantically stopped and Kumokawa Maria cartwheeled to the side to avoid it. The tea should have had steam rising from it, but it started to freeze in midair. The volume of objects changed when they changed state such as from liquid to solid. If they had been hit by the tea, it may have torn up the surface of their bodies.

However, it would not have been a fatal blow.

While continuing to cartwheel, Kumokawa Maria changed direction. By bringing down her long leg that was pointed straight up, she aimed for Kihara Enshuu's head.

In response, Kihara Enshuu threw the empty can at Kumokawa Maria's feet…or rather hands. Kumokawa Maria had to alter her course a bit to avoid it, and that created an opening.

"How naïve. How naïve."

In the time she had created, Kihara Enshuu brought one hand around to her back. She pulled something out from her sweater. It was a multipurpose lighter. Unlike a normal one, it had a trigger like a gun and the opening was located 30 cm out from where it was held.

Kihara Enshuu took a light step back to keep Saflee Opendays in the edge of her vision as the older girl tried to circle around from a different direction. She spun the multipurpose lighter around on her index finger and then raised her arm.

"Ready, set…"

She pulled her finger on the trigger.

A dry clicking noise rang out.

At a slight diagonal from the top of her head, the multipurpose lighter lit at a position just barely away from the nearby pile of plant factory containers.

"Go!"

A strange flame enveloped an entire container. Of course, a mere lighter could not produce such a flame. The extent and way which it spread was odd.

"You prepared oil beforehand!?" shouted Saflee as she protected her face from the light and heat.

"Not just that."

The sound of something heavy sliding could be heard.

It was coming from the gaps between the containers. The second layer of containers was solidly sliding. Even though dozens if not hundreds of tons of weight were pressing down on them from above, they slid as if on ice.

"*What makes skis or skates slide so well is not snow or ice. It is the water that has been melted by friction. …Isn't that right, Amata-ojisan.*"

They slid.

They shook.

They collapsed.

"*And when the resistance from friction is incredibly low, even something with hundreds of tons weighing down on it will slide well. Now, here is a question. If you remove the lowest card from a house of cards, what happens*!?"

The hundreds of plant factory containers rained down from above.

One of the many piles of containers utterly collapsed.

Each container was like a die about 2 meters across. They weighed one ton. Having them approaching like an avalanche produced a nightmarish effect.

Smiling, Kihara Enshuu took two steps back.

Saflee had reflexively flinched as the giant bulkhead like containers crashed down before her eyes. Snow soared into the sky and then the container it had been covering flattened it back down to the ground. Fragments of the outer walls of and steel racks within the plant factories scattered about.

As that meteor shower of destruction rained down, Kihara Enshuu spun the multipurpose lighter around on her index finger and brought the opening up to her mouth.

"*Yes, yes. Shouting so loudly is embarrassing, but doing so is what it is to be a Kihara, right*?" she whispered into the weapon that had caused the disaster as if it were a microphone. She then raised her voice. "*Okay, then! This exciting attraction that takes contestants from the audience has begun!! Now, will anyone be able to achieve victory and take home the prize!?"*

As she shouted, Kihara Enshuu waved the multipurpose lighter around some more. The container with the developing biological weapon within was not around her. She caused a second and third wave with the piles that had just barely escaped collapsing before.

Because containers were falling near Kihara Enshuu as well, she was unable to see what was happening to Saflee and Kumokawa Maria.

However, she could gather information from the sky above using a helicopter-like toy that was linked to her smartphone. If all the piles collapsed that she assumed would, it would all be over. Kihara Enshuu had set the containers to avalanche down on everywhere but a very small safe area.

That was what a Kihara was.

The resourcefulness or battle ability of the opponent did not matter.

They shook the stage of the battle itself, destroyed the pre-established rules, and defeated the excellent students who did so well in the preparations.

(The containers are falling around me too, so they will function as a giant hurdle keeping them away.)

Kihara Enshuu smiled as she fired flames at a nearby plant factory to collapse the pile due to the reduced friction provided by the film of water.

(The enemy is blocked by the mental wall of fear and the physical wall of the obstacles. Once they are unable to move and can only cower in place, I will finish them off with a solid carpet bombing!!)

But immediately afterwards, Kihara Enshuu's thoughts were cut off.

Kumokawa Maria's long leg had come roaring down onto the top of her head.

The obstacles were 2 meter dice. Kumokawa had run toward the container, jumped up on its wall, climbed up with both hands, rolled across the top, and brought down her heel while dropping down next to Kihara Enshuu. Explained step by step like that, it was not impossible. Someone who had trained as a street performer may have been able to pull it off in one long flowing motion.

However, hundreds of containers were raining down.

If even one of those hit her, it would have crushed her body.

The odds of success could not even be guessed at. Normally, that would have put mental restraints on someone. She should not have been able to pull off that series of athletics.

Someone bound by the fear of a Kihara should not have been able to do it.

"Gh…Gah…gah…!! Did my Kihara not activate properly so it did not act as enough of a restraint!?"

Kihara Enshuu moved back away from Kumokawa Maria with the unnatural movement of a toy missing a gear. She left the safe area she had set up for herself.

Meanwhile, Kumokawa Maria realized the value of the spot Kihara Enshuu had been staying in, so she simply stayed where she was.

"You are quite different from the Kihara I know," she said while breathing visible breaths. "I do not think Kihara Kagun would prepare all this. If he was that skillful, he would never have caused that incident and left the school."

"*Do you think you have defeated the Kiharas just because you pushed back Amata-ojisan*?"

The pattern of the graphs displayed on the smartphone and 1seg television hanging from Kihara Enshuu's neck underwent a clear change.

The girl's lips moved.

“*Ransuu-ojisan, Gensei-ojiisan, Byouri-obasan, Nayuta-chan, Yuiitsu-oneechan, Jouryuu-oniichan, Konshou-oneechan, Chokuryuu-kun, Doutai-ojisan, Kagun-ojisan, Bunri-oniichan, Sousai-chan, Kenbi-obasan, Bunshi-oniichan, Therestina-obasan, Kouten-oneechan.*” With her arms spread wide, Kihara Enshuu announced, “*I may indeed lack something as a Kihara, but I am supported by the combat patterns of 5000 Kiharas!! Mere undergrowth that has not taken a step into the darkness of Academy City cannot hope to break this great tree*!!”

She was inputting new combat patterns.

The Kihara[1] was budding.

Faced with that monster…

Without hesitation, Kumokawa Maria stepped outside the safe zone and planted the bottom of her foot in Kihara Enshuu’s cheek.

“Bh…?”

In that instant as her cheek was distorted into something ugly, Kihara Enshuu’s expression was one of pure confusion. Kumokawa Maria followed through her kick all the way to the side.

“Bghvrbche!?”

While letting out that cry that did not form any words, Kihara Enshuu collapsed on top of the snow. Kumokawa Maria paid no heed to the containers raining down from overhead and stepped forward. She was going to finish this. She would defeat Kihara Enshuu and destroy the mold being turned into a biological weapon.

“Bh…gh!!”

Kihara Enshuu continued to retreat as she stood up while holding her bloody nose and mouth.

“There are two reasons that you lost,” said Kumokawa Maria. “I don’t know about this 5000 Kiharas thing, but how did you analyze their combat patterns? Did you give them a psychological test? Did you borrow the help of a Psychometer? Or did you just stalk them and watch them? Whatever you did, I have one thing to ask you. Did you truly succeed in analyzing their combat patterns 100% accurately? Do you really think someone who has to supplement her own skill with external sources could perfectly come to that result?”

“…!?”

---

[1] Kihara literally means “field of trees”.

"You look like you don't like what I'm saying. Then let us put it to the test. One thing that caught my attention was your use of the name Kihara Kagun. If you can truly replicate his skill, I will be unable to resist."

A clear change came over the smartphone and 1seg television hanging from Kihara Enshuu's neck. The countless graphs gave her power.

"*Yes, yes, I understand, Kagun-ojisan. In this case, a Kihara would do th-…*!!"

"I don't think so."

Kumokawa Maria took a large step forward and punched Kihara Enshuu's head on with her right fist.

"Is that all you have? You use the name of Kihara Kagun and that's all you have? Then the quality of your analysis is as good as proven. You simply cannot replicate anyone with that toy. Really, all you can do is name Kihara Kagun or Kihara Amata beforehand to frighten those who know them."

"*Kamijo-…*!!"

"Maybe with my sister, but that isn't going to scare me."

"*I understand. In this case, Kumokawa Maria would-…*!!"

"Are you serious?"

Each time Kihara Enshuu's movements changed, Kumokawa Maria used her four limbs in ever-changing attacks to beat her down. As Kihara Enshuu received countless counters, her looks changed. Kumokawa Maria ignored her and continued speaking. She may have only been so violent because they were both girls.

"Whether you have 5000 Kiharas or Kamijou Touma as your 10,000th personality, that is nothing more than having the same cards as an opponent in a card game. You have not become Kamijou Touma. You have only put together the same deck as him. No matter what deck you put together, *you are making the decision of which cards to use in battle on your own*."

That was why she could not win.

It was not about whether she had a rare card or not.

If Kihara Enshuu did not have skill as a player, that would not help.

"You set all the rules up perfectly, but you cannot role play properly. That is why you said such strange things for being Kihara Kagun. It's the same in battle. Your mistakes in judgment changed the idiosyncrasies of the deck to something else."

"I…can't win…?"

"That's right."

"With my intellect and with the use of any Kihara or Kamijou Touma or Kumokawa Maria, I can't win?"

"To be honest, it feels like playing chess against a really shitty AI opponent."

Kihara Enshuu's eyes shook.

Even the synchronization between left and right ended.

However, she forcibly pushed away that confusion and hesitation.

The graphs on the devices hanging from her neck grew even more muddled. Ignoring the shake of Kumokawa Maria's head, Kihara Enshuu shouted out.

"No, I will win!! I have a solution!! I am a Kihara too! A Kihara is a Kihara just by being a Kihara! *That's what Amata-ojichan, Ransuu-ojichan, Kagun-ojichan, and Byouri-obasan are all telling me*!!"

"From the point that you think Kihara Kagun would say that, your analysis of him is clearly wrong. The Kihara Kagun I know would not say that," muttered Kumokawa, but it did not seem to reach the other girl.

An odd clicking noise came from the multipurpose lighter in Enshuu's hand.

To turn it into a weapon, she must have altered the emitter for the gas to turn it into something like a flamethrower.

With the strange graphs in her eyes, Kihara Enshuu charged forward.

In that instant, Kihara Enshuu had a single chance for victory.

It may have been true that she could not defeat Kumokawa Maria with the strategies from the graphs. However, she had one more Kihara. One Kihara remained to her.

That was Kihara Enshuu herself.

Because it was her, she did not need to analyze that Kihara and did not have to input the combat pattern in the form of graphs. Even if it was inexperienced, she had one final Kihara pattern.

Even if Kumokawa Maria had seen the weakness of all the combat patterns inputted via the graphs, Kihara Enshuu's own pattern was different. If Kumokawa Maria felt relieved that she had a countermeasure against the combat patterns created from the graphs, that would open a hole in her security that Kihara Enshuu could get a finishing blow in through.

That was why she smiled.

And licked her lips.

She released the Kihara within herself and charged forward to roast the other girl with the multipurpose lighter that had been modified to act like a flamethrower.

Immediately afterwards, her thoughts were cut off. The Kihara in her vanished.

This had been caused by Kumokawa Maria's leg. A merciless roundhouse kick had hit Kihara Enshuu in the temple.

"I told you there were two reasons you had lost," spat out Kumokawa Maria as she stopped her rotation. She continued to speak to Kihara Enshuu who had sunk into the snow. "Even as you used all those decks, a hint of yourself remained. As you fought, that hint drew an outline. To put it simply, I was able to analyze your combat pattern before you ever used your own deck, so there was no problem. It was no threat. I was able to counterattack your deck easily. Just like with all the other Kiharas."

"U-uuh..."

A hard click rang out.

The multipurpose lighter Kihara Enshuu held spewed a 2 meter flame.

As she writhed in the white snow, Kihara Enshuu's dark pupils stared directly at Kumokawa Maria.

"If you aim that at me, I'm pretty sure the reflected heat will burn you as well. Well, I doubt you'll listen."

She attacked again.

This was not one of the complex combat patterns like before. She merely charged.

She was prepared to be defeated herself as long as she defeated Kumokawa.

Even when cornered, confused, and unable to think properly, she was truly a Kihara in the fact that she chose the option of a more dangerous victory over utter defeat.

Kumokawa Maria spun around and attacked with her four limbs at angles that would normally be impossible.

With a dull noise, Kihara Enshuu bent backwards.

But she did not fall.

She was no longer acting out of reason or intellect. She was acting out of a purely instinctual Kihara part of herself. She did not have the normal thought processes that led to evading or defending when pain was coming.

Kihara Enshuu adjusted her grip on the multipurpose lighter.

She held her index finger down as hard as she could on the trigger-like portion.

That lighter that had clearly had the amount of outputted gas altered could fire 2 meter flames for 30 continuous seconds like a flamethrower.

"*Time to dance in the flames, you whore*!"

Immediately afterwards, a dull noise rang out.

Kihara Enshuu's right hand was pierced through by a blade that looked like a gardening trowel.

It was the kunai used by the Kouga ninja.

"Gah…?"

Strength left her index finger.

Kihara Enshuu heard a voice even as she saw Kumokawa Maria's knee headed for her temple.

The voice came from Saflee Opendays who had finally managed to climb over the containers blocking her way.

"I don't really know that girl. I just invited in all the people I thought I could use. Did you not realize a *ninja* and a man obsessed with electromagnetic waves was here as well as that maid? Well, the ninja did sound me out first with a paper airplane."

Kihara Enshuu looked over at the weapon located a bit away from her hand.

She focused on the words of Kumokawa Maria's that slipped into her ears.

"That is how you properly use comrades. Not through combat patterns and decks."

Immediately afterwards, a hammer-like impact knocked Kihara Enshuu completely unconscious.

♦

A few of the piles of plant factories had been destroyed, but over half of them remained standing. A figure lay on her stomach 20 meters up on one of those snow-covered containers.

"They safely defeated a Kihara. By destroying the transformers, they have stopped the alteration of Ransuu-chan's mold into a biological weapon."

The voice giggled.

The owner of that voice that might sound gentle at first was Kihara Byouri.

Having finished tying up the unconscious Kihara Enshuu, her targets, Kumokawa Maria, Oumi Shuri, and Saflee Opendays, had all gathered in one place. They were chatting and joking to relieve their tension.

"Well, I suppose this is the time to target them. If I had interrupted the battle, they may have made unexpected movements that would throw off my aim. And more importantly, Enshuu-chan would have noticed me and attacked. Waiting for them to stop moving first is the best way to make them give up."

Kihara Byouri pulled out thick metal nails.

An unpleasant noise like cracking plastic came from her arm.

Originally, it had not been just her legs depending on the #2's Dark Matter. The alteration had reached her entire body. When Kihara Enshuu had seemed to borrow the strength of Kamijou Touma, she had been satisfied with just crushing Kihara Byouri's upper body. However, Kihara Byouri could restore a crushed heart or ruptured liver with a single command.

And the alterations had gone beyond merely restoration.

"Form change. Reference: Skyfish."

When throwing from a lying position, one could only use from one's elbow forward, similar to in darts. As could be seen from the fact that a long throw in baseball used all of the thrower's body weight, this limited the distance and strength of the throw.

However, the alterations to her body overturned this.

Something like pleats appeared on the side of Kihara Byouri's right arm. Her arm took on the expected form of the cryptid known as the skyfish that could freely fly around at unseeable speed. With that arm, the light darts-like toss of the metal nail was enough to accurately pierce through the containers 1000 meters away.

"Our primary enemy is Gremlin, but our primary goal is to eliminate the Anti-Academy Science Guardians in control of Baggage City and anyone who would protect them. Only regret remains for those who put themselves in that category."

One toss would end it all.

The enemy might flee at superhuman speed. But it would not last long. Kihara Byouri was looking down from above the piles of containers, so one would have to run down the long rows of containers to escape to cover. In that time, she would have 8 precise opportunities to snipe and 300 if she could fire continuously. Even if they did escape to cover, she had the piercing power needed to fire straight through the containers.

All that was left was the issue of probability.

Think of playing Russian roulette 100 times with 5 bullets loaded. If the cylinder was rotated randomly after each shot, it was statistically possible to survive to the end, but how difficult that would be goes without saying.

However, despite being full of openings, Kumokawa Maria, Saflee Opendays, and Oumi Shuri were not pierced through the head or chest by metal nails moving at ultra-high speed.

Just before beginning her attack, Kihara Byouri heard the sound of footsteps on a nearby container.

"!!"

Kihara Byouri twisted her body up from her lying position and fired the metal nail in her right hand toward the source of the noise. She did not particularly care who it was. She merely fired the ultra-high speed sniper shot at the target's forehead and her aim was spot on.

The person was wearing a coat.

The person was wearing a full face helmet.

The thick nail sank into the forehead of the helmet and countless large cracks ran through it. The full face helmet completely shattered in less than a second. With the hard helmet destroyed, the person's face was revealed.

His face was unscathed.

Normally, his skull would have been destroyed and gray matter would have spewed out.

More importantly, Kihara Byouri knew the man's face well.

"Kihara Kagun…!?"

The metal nail that should have shattered his skull was deflected and fell to the ground somewhere while spinning.

The man ignored it and said, "I worked hard for this moment."

That man who had survived that fatal attack took a step forward.

"I have worked hard for this delightfully Kihara-like moment by reusing Kihara Enshuu as bait in order to defeat my target. I did the same thing you did regarding Kumokawa Maria and the others. I waited for the moment when the situation calmed down. You had your wheelchair, your leg assisting robot, that formation of your legs using Dark Matter, and that body. To be satisfied that I have killed you requires proof that all of your safety devices have been destroyed."

That was why he had waited.

He had waited for when she had taken a certain level of damage and lost all of her safety devices.

He had waited for the bare Kihara Byouri to appear.

He had waited for the moment when she confidently brought out her final weapon.

"Have you used up all your safety devices? Are you out of transformations? If so, I am quite glad. The chance to finish off Kihara Byouri has finally come my way."

"I know that you resent the Kihara within you. Even if you were protecting the elementary school students from that attacker, you still chose to kill in order to resolve it. But isn't it wrong to hate the other Kiharas because of it?"

"Something had bothered me," said Kihara Kagun calmly. "It is true that I killed that attacker in order to protect the students. I was even cleared of all charges in court. But who was that attacker? He wasn't just some villain who *just so happened to cross my path* and *just so happened to make me take action*, was he?"

"…"

"He was a pawn you prepared." Kihara Kagun was not asking. "After all, you are a genius when it comes to making people give up. Burning away someone's reason at the proper timing would not be hard for you. You cornered some normal child and turned him into an attacker. And if the basis of your actions lies in giving up…"

"But…" Kihara Byouri slowly stood up from her lying position and brushed the snow off of herself. "A Kihara that helps people. A Kihara that children look up to. As the one that gave up right away, that is a troubling possibility, isn't it? As you are a representative of us Kiharas, *I needed you to give up too, Kagun-chan*."

"I already knew the answer, but it still feels good to hear it from you. That trigger had more of an effect than you could have imagined."

A Kihara questioning a Kihara.

A model response.

What that led to was of course not hope.

"So that attacker was just another victim."

Kihara Kagun's face held no expression but it still twisted slightly.

'Proper' anger was displayed there.

"I killed him as evil without thinking about it deeply enough. I sullied that victim of a child with the name of an attacker of young children and that label will never leave him. That is why I must at least carry out this revenge. As the two perpetrators of this wrong, this revenge will not be complete until one of us is defeated."

It was not over just because he had discovered the truth. He did not plan to stick the person behind it with all the blame and run away.

He would settle what he had done.

The teacher that Kihara Byouri had once denied stood before her.

"Oh, dear. Now this is a problem. It seems you still have not given in, Kagun-chan."

A cracking noise came from within Kihara Byouri's smiling body.

She was clearly preparing for some kind of attack.

"The one you want to protect is not that attacker who is already dead, is it? It does not matter if it is someone you see has hope within Kihara like Nayuta-chan, someone from Academy City like Kumokawa Maria, or even outsiders like Saflee Opendays or Oumi Shuri. That is the type of teacher you were."

An oversight.

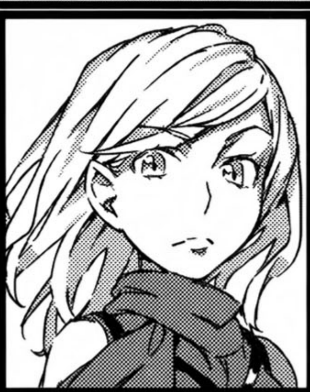
A mistake.

The expert in making others give up smiled widely as she was about to redo her job perfectly.

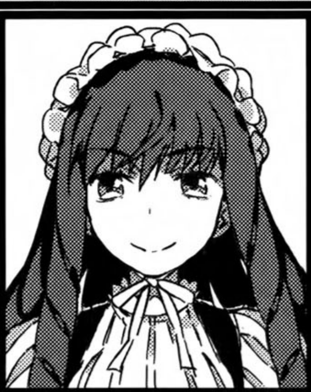
“So make sure you give in this time. Making others give up is the one thing I will never give up on as the one who gives up on everything.”

The clash between Kihara and Kihara began.

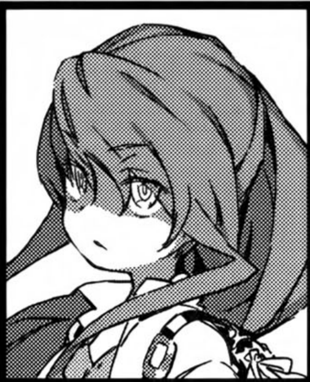
Key persons of “Baggage City”



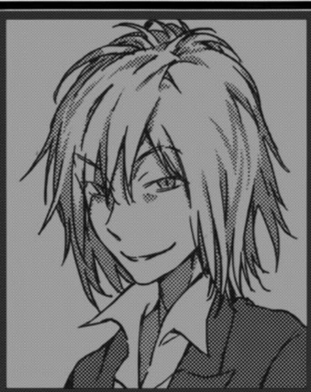
Natural Selector competitor
Saflee Opendays



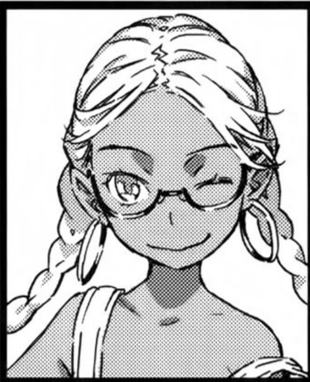
Academy City’s maid girl
Kumokawa Maria



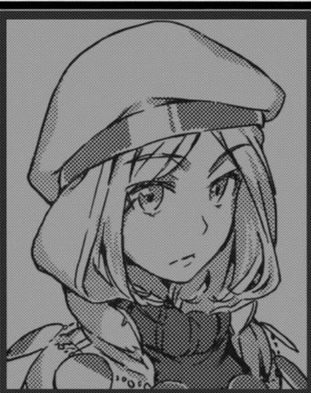
Natural Selector competitor
Oumi Shuri



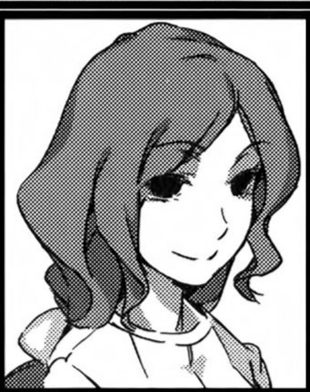
GREMLIN’s official member
Útgarða-Loki



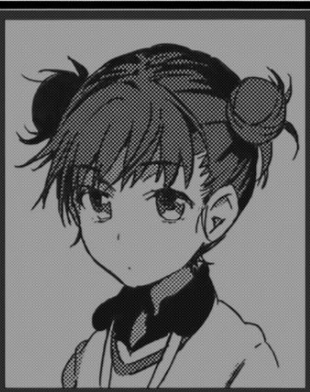
GREMLIN’s official member
Marian Slingeneyer



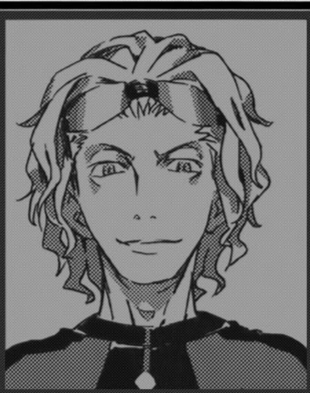
GREMLIN’s official member
Sigyn



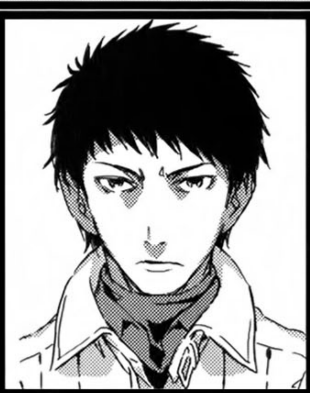
Kihara family
Kihara Byouri



Kihara family
Kihara Enshuu



Kihara family
Kihara Ransuu



Helmeted Man
Kihara Kagun

CONFIDENTIAL
DOCUMENTS

MAIN.31

The plant factory containers were piled up, and 20m above, Kihara Kagun and Kihara Byouri started to battle. Kihara Byouri was the first one to take action, and she shot out the nails. *GONK*!! The skyfish-shaped right hand construct shot out like a sniper bullet. It was aimed for Kihara Kagun's brain and heart before piercing through it.

That should be the case.

However, he wasn't hurt. There wasn't any blood flowing. Kihara Kagun landed back hard, and didn't look injured at all. This wasn't because his body's recovery was fast, but because he wasn't hurt at all. He casually walked over, and pointed his index and middle fingers as he shook his right hand like he was trying to rip the air apart.

DONK!! A blunt sound exploded.

Kihara Byouri couldn't understand what happened at all.

However, it was obvious. Her right arm had been sliced off from the shoulder. After that, Kihara Kagun's finger showed a bluish-white laser blade that was several meters long. Right now, it looked like his two fingers were holding onto a huge shaver blade.

"Ha, haha!!"

Kihara Byouri laughed.

The right hand that had been sliced off wasn't bleeding at all. This unnatural sliced off surface actually started to rise up.

"Form Change. Reference: Yeti!!"

A large and furry arm that didn't match Kihara Byouri's appearance at all flew out. Kihara Kagun became wary. His thoughts stopped for a moment as something unexpected happened. Kihara Byouri used this chance to slam a fist over above Kihara Kagun.

The containers were crushed.

BEKOO!! With the sound of this impact, Kihara Kagun was smashed together with the containers he was standing on.

He was definitely dead.

Whether it was in the flesh or the bones or the heart, the festering feeling continued to tell her.

Even though that should be the case,

“Is that all?”

A voice entered her ears.

After that, all the voices vanished.

Several bluish-white lights danced around, and the crushed plant factory containers were sliced into different parts, removing the many restraints on his body. Appearing there was Kihara Kagun standing below. He looked up at Kihara Byouri from below as he said that.

There was no sign of injury at all.

There were no signs of bleeding.

“What’s, going on…?”

“Are you still drunk over getting that so-called #2 brand? Whether it’s the element or some other things, the overall conclusion is that it’s way too easy to achieve it if it’s just like that.”

“What did you get…? I can’t see the Kihara you have! You, who took part in the near-death experience research, seemed to be proud of it when you’re about to sleep. This is a skill that my own hands couldn’t get!!”

Kihara Kagun didn’t answer

Kihara Byouri turned her right hand into a skyfish and continued to shoot out large nails more than 3 times. However, it couldn’t deal any damage to Kihara Kagun, and he hadn’t used super speed to dodge them.

He was hit directly.

His head, heart, stomach, all the critical vital points were hit, and that wasn’t all.

No, Kihara Kagun slightly adjusted his body, or rather, protected his own vitals.

And then…

Kihara Kagun took action while Kihara Byouri was confused. He didn't move up from below, but continued to slice the plant factory containers around him. He forcefully pulled Kihara Byouri down from those positions in such a manner as if he was slicing mountains.

Kihara Byouri continued to close in on Kihara Kagun cautiously as she fell together with the metal remains of the containers, and pondered.

(That's strange. I know this because I'm a Kihara. Kiharas and Kiharas, and they have a huge relation to science. On the other hand, not all of science is bound to Kihara. In a certain sense, their strategies can be deduced…!!)

The right hand was equipped with the yeti construct, but it was immediately crushed by Kihara Kagun, and this wasn't of any difficulty to him as he didn't have any damage at all. He continued to move forward in large steps as he didn't even bother to dodge. His right index and middle fingers were kept together, and a bluish-white laser blade came out from them before it started to swing without pretense.

(Can't give, up…!! This guy, Kihara Kagun's power, what form of science is it…!!?)

Her thoughts stopped.

Kihara Byouri's face was shifted to the side.

It was tilted.

Whether it was the skull or the brain, these things were rolling gracefully like they were in a cylinder.

The brain was destroyed.

This was death.

At this decisive moment, a new development suddenly occurred.

"Form Change. Reference: Little Grey."

The lips that rolled back into the body let these words slip out.

The front end of Kihara Byouri's fingers, *BOGON*!! expanded out like an airship. They became as large as oranges. If there's a need for another comparison, it would be roughly as big as a toddler's scalp.

This was a function to build the brain.

And because of this, there was a consideration to allow residents of Academy City to use it.

ZOOMMM!!!

After that, that inexplicable power was activated. Kihara Kagun was involved in a rather destructive explosion.

The right hand became like a giant's arm, and on the left hand, the 5-brained monster slowly smirked.

The grey dust and the flying snow danced around as she said,

"In the beginning, this was an ability to create a brain, a side effect of that experiment. That experiment itself was a failure. It's true that the brain is part of the body. Simply put, the brain can't operate as a brain if it doesn't go through my body."

That smile was lacking, but after a while, the face would be complete.

"Well, I can only use the power at Level 2 or Level 3. The initial driving concept was that if I want to hold people up and punish them, I just need about 5 people. I can also use the wave-shaped attack to peel off flesh and blood from the bone. I'm really fine with that, but the effect was rather good, wasn't it?"

The heart wouldn't stop even after being wrecked like that.

The brain wouldn't stop even after being sliced off.

If it could be created, it could be replaced. If it could be used, it was fine even if it was lost. Kihara Byouri. She had become an existence that was more than why humans were humans.

"...This is a Kihara. We use science as a base humans exist on, use these methods and create breakthroughs through areas that far exceed expectations. Can you understand the essence of it?"

"*Of course, I knew that.*"

Kihara Byouri's smile froze as the man's voice came from behind.

Suddenly, she noticed it.

The grey dust was scattered about. Kihara Kagun, who should have been blown to bits, was standing with all his limbs intact. His coat and shirt had all been blown away as he stood in this -20 degrees region with his upper body naked. However, his upper body wasn't bleeding at all, just like before.

"…When, did you repair it?"

"It was never damaged in the first place. It will never be damaged. My body can change like that."

Kihara Byouri's legs trembled.

What made Kihara Byouri more uneasy than the current battle ability was this completely unknown situation that she couldn't understand at all. Amongst the Kiharas, she was a Kihara in the higher group. Even if it was something different from her profession, she could tell what sort of scientific theory was behind it. However, she couldn't understand the current situation at all. She couldn't understand what was in front of her.

Kihara Byouri herself was an existence that could create brains or hearts, and this alone would be illegal. Amongst all the facts of science she knew about, none of them could explain Kihara Kagun's current situation.

What was it then?

Without borrowing any power or laws, such a person could actually distort reality. Why was that?

"No…"

Kihara Byouri muttered.

There were such things — rules that even she, who was well-versed in all sorts of science, couldn't understand. In the wide field of science, what kind of existence existed outside? Kihara Byouri herself may only know one or two of these. In Baggage City, she once tried to pursue such things.

Yes.

"*Don't tell me, you're…a member of Gremlin…*!?"

In that realm that could roughly be called the world of science, even to the Kiharas, who had exhausted all means to have that breakthrough, it was a realm nobody was able to touch before.

Magic.

Or rather, the magician controlling it.

"What are you talking about?"

In contrast, Kihara Kagun pointed his right index and middle fingers and smiled.

The bluish-white blade appeared again.

“I’m a Kihara, you know? What will you do if your opponent is something you can’t imagine?”

“An, an external method…ugh!!”

Having been defeated, Kihara Byouri said these things she could think of without a second thought. At the same time, she was pondering over whether this kind of existence was something she was unaware of. She then analyzed the situation in front of her again…

(If he really has the ability to nullify all damage, he wouldn’t have chosen this day to attack me. He could have revealed his real name to Academy City, snuck back in and killed all the Kiharas. There must be some special characteristics to Kihara Kagun’s defense. It should be possible to deduce this from his actions.)

Kihara Byouri used the assumption that magic itself was a ‘supernatural power that was a contrast from those made in Academy City’ to build her thoughts according to an esper who could take on Academy City.

(Kihara Kagun deliberately used his vitals to take my attack. In that case…)

“…”

Kihara Byouri changed her right hand to a skyfish, and shot out a thick nail.

However, this wasn’t aimed at Kihara Kagun’s vitals, but his shoulder. To create a little graze that would normally be ignored, this nail flew at a very high speed as it peeled off part of Kihara Kagun’s skin

Just like what she thought.

This time, he was injured. Blood came out of his shoulders.

“I don’t understand the composition, but it’s true that you can nullify fatal attacks. That’s your defense! In that case…!!”

“So you’re trying to kill me by creating lots of non-fatal wounds and let me bleed out a lot, aren’t you?”

His weaknesses were completely exposed, but Kihara Kagun’s expression still remained dry.

“In Norse mythology, there are a lot of stories about putting gemstones on the hilt of the sword. It seemed that it could become some sort of talisman, and it had the effect of healing the damage sustained in battle… But for me who is not well-versed in that, I can’t do anything other than dodging all fatal attacks.”

As he was a derivative of science, Kihara Kagun could understand this thing that couldn’t be justified and continued,

“But this could still be useful. Let’s talk about a dueling sword called Whitting[1]. When in battle, this sword will scatter when its owner is at a disadvantage, and amongst them, a miracle would occur…it’s a spell that can accurately avoid damage and cause the sword to be sharper. When both are assembled, the sword’s destructive power will increase exponentially.”

He pointed his right index and middle finger, and raised that several meter long sword horizontally.

“…If you want to kill me by non-fatal attacks, you will need a minimum of 12 hits. That would be enough. I can kill you 52 times. What I got in battle wasn’t a guess, but a belief. Why don’t you normally use such a power? Or is it that if you had only this level of freedom, you would have to rely on your persona as the woman Kihara Byouri…? It may be a threat, but even so, you should be losing yourself already, aren’t you?”

“Ugh!?”

“The proof is that you’re increasingly unable to get rid of the #2. You continue to command the electric signals. However, the things created by the #2 still have his own presence. And then, this is just like a rejection in a transplant. Kihara Byouri’s consciousness is being chased away by an artificial body. Is the limit 100 seconds? 500 seconds? I don’t think it’s that long. If I continue to kill you during this time, you still won’t be able to do anything in the end even if you understand all sorts of danger, as you’re still relying on the #2. As time goes by, you will wait on and crumble to a certain extent. After that, you will end up destroying yourself. Your so-called physical body may not be killed, but your spirit will be worn out.”

“…Form change. Reference: Loch Ness.”

She transformed. And,

Kihara Byouri’s body was rumbling.

It looked like she was transforming into something big. As foreboding, all sorts of reassembly happened in her body.

“Both you and I are most likely near immortal. However, there are some clear distinctions. The ability to recover from injuries or to thoroughly erase them. It may look trivial, but there’s a huge difference, especially when we’re in a battle of attrition here.”

“…”

“If I win, my body can be patched up! But if you win, you’ll remain injured. That’s why I never thought about winning. Let’s blow each other up, and die together! It’ll be great. Let’s end this! As for you, you can only win. Whether you win or not, this will continue to be a stalemate!! This difference decides everything. To put it, it’s like winning in rock-paper-scissors or this kind of battle. The situation will be the same!!”

GICHIGICHI. Kihara Byouri’s body continued to expand.

The savage dragon and the knight.

This was a common depiction in many legends, and Norse legends loved to build such stories, but she probably wouldn’t understand it when she didn’t understand magic.

“…That’s not it, Kihara Byouri.”

And then, the magician who was able to show the unique trait of the dueling sword Whitting bowed slightly and muttered,

Or rather, the hero in Norse mythology.

The man named Bersi.

“I said it right from the beginning. I would take revenge for the boy whom you degraded into a murderer. I came here for that. In that case, victory wouldn’t matter. You, who prompted that murderer, and me, who killed that murderer; once we continue to fight, my aim will be achieved.”

“How is this poss…”

As Kihara Byouri groaned, this man lifted his head,

Kihara Byouri is trying her best, but she’s about to collapse. That was what he thought.

That teacher.

“Thank you, Kihara Byouri. It’s unexpected that you have the power of the #2. If that wasn’t the case, you would have used other means to strengthen your body. If this power with such characteristics could be integrated, I suppose this battle of attrition would end. Your unorthodox doctrine was just as I expected. You wanted to head for that decisive victory.”

ZONZANBANGANZANGANKII!!!!

And…

The knight and the savage dragon fought each other, and both sides tried to perish together.

There was no way to attain redemption.

At the same time, he faced the murderer boy who couldn’t be saved and was killed.

And completed that little revenge.

PERIOD.32

Even when she was on the ground, Kumokawa Maria could see the storm.

The monsters were fighting in a blood fest in the middle of the plant factory containers that had been severed and crushed into rubble. This was obviously different from the normal concept of winning or losing. Defense was non-existent, and just like the words implied, they were killing each other. It was this kind of battle. They were beating, crushing, piercing, slicing, ripping and gnawing at each other. This battle had all sorts of destructive acts, and both of them continued to fight to the death as they fell to the ground.

Kumokawa Maria called out one of the names.

But that man never responded.

A terrifying explosive sound rang, and the two people in the air changed. On one side…it looked like a human woman was devoured by a dinosaur. The silhouette of this monster suddenly slipped, and her body continued to crash down the pile of containers before falling over to where Kumokawa Maria was.

"Wha…"

'Thud. *And,*

The dinosaur that collapsed on the snow seemed to be saying.

"What's, going on… No, I didn't need to kill. What's that enemy who likes to make people give up doing in… in such a place…"

That long-necked dragon-like thing was staring at Kumokawa Maria. Its mouth that had neat rows of large, human-like teeth was opened.

At this moment, she thought of it.

This fear.

What she had experienced before.

It was the same feeling as when she saw that person wielding the knife near the elementary school gate, when she was glared at.

However, the weapon this time wouldn't attack Kumokawa Maria.

Not this time. No,

Above.

As if trying to use his right hand to stab into the head of the dinosaur, that man collapsed from the pile of containers.

That man lost his left arm, his upper body was stained with blood, and his skin wasn't intact.

That man used his own method to ruin his own personality.

It was a mystery what skill was used, as the remaining right arm, from the hand to the elbow, was stabbed into the dinosaur's head. And then, a decisive blow was given. The dinosaur continued to shriek, but midway through, it lost all its strength. The body looked like it was tossed out as it then stopped completely. The color of the skin became transparent, and then, *Salasala*, it started to dissolve into the snow.

That man continued to shake the dinosaur's head and threw it over at the snow. He could dodge all the fatal injuries, but the loss of blood was about to kill him. Perhaps this was what he had intended, considering the position of the wounds.

"SENSEI!!!"

Kumokawa Maria ran over and called that man, but not by his name. He collapsed on the ground and used his unfocused eyes to look over at the source of the voice. But to the man, it was a strange thing whether he knew the man or not. Most likely, he lost all his memories before and after that incident. *Where is this place?* As he thought about it, he lost his ability to think about anything else.

The man seemed to see a different person as he looked up at Kumokawa Maria's face.

He lost his strength in his body, but his lips continued to tremble.

It seemed like he said,

"So, rry…"

Immediately after that, the man couldn't move.

This man had most likely bet his entire existence just to say those words.

It probably took him a long time to say these words. He was always pained by it, but now he could finally gain release.

He gave up everything.

He continued to torture himself even at his limits.

He continued to do that even now. He continued to fight until his last breath, all to say these words of redemption.

The man was gradually being buried by the -20 degrees Celsius of flying snow. Realizing this, she finally said.

“I knew.”

In this world where even tears could freeze quickly, Kumokawa Maria bent down slightly.

This voice became a cry. She shouted out everything that she had kept inside her,

“I KNEW BECAUSE I KEPT LOOKING INTO IT!! YOU DID LOTS OF THINGS TO HELP US, AND EVEN LEFT SECRETLY TO PREVENT US FROM BECOMING MURDERERS, SENSEI!! YOU’VE BEEN BOTHERED BY THIS ALL THE TIME, ABOUT WHO HAD SET UP THAT MURDERER!! SENSEI, ARE, ARE YOU GOING TO APOLOGIZE TO US NOW!?”

There was no response.

Not even a nod.

The face that was covered by the white snow only showed the smile of a victor.

“BUT I KNOW THINGS THAT YOU DON’T KNOW EITHER, SENSEI!! THOSE LIVES YOU SAVED ARE WALKING DOWN DIFFERENT PATHS!! EVERYONE IS GRATEFUL TO YOU!! EVERYONE IS WORRIED ABOUT YOU! IT WASN’T FUTILE! WE DON’T KNOW HOW MUCH YOU HATE YOURSELF, SENSEI, BUT THIS ISN’T FUTILE AT ALL!!”

That smile, that silhouette, gradually vanished.

This merciless sky of flying snow dyed a layer of white over that immobilized person.

“DAMN IT, DON’T DIE WITH A SATISFIED LOOK!! I’LL BEAT YOU UP!! I’LL BEAT YOU TO DEATH IF IT WILL WAKE YOU UP!!! BESIDES, I HATE PEOPLE LIKE YOU THE MOST!! THAT’S WHY YOU HAVE TO GIVE IT YOUR ALL!! BUT, WHY…WHY MUST YOU JUST SIMPLY DIE LIKE THAT!!”

Cries, lamentations, tears.

But the outcome couldn’t be changed.

In this world—and because it was this world—Kihara Kagun made a decision, and Kumokawa Maria was still alive in this world.

It wasn't a waste to exchange his life for those who chose to give their lives up.

All the Kiharas who had swept through Baggage City were stopped.

However, there was the presence of another organization in this city.

Gremlin.

One of them.

Seemingly hopping on one leg as she moved about, Marian Slingeneyer, who had a messy-looking bandage on her eye, stood on the plant factory, and stared coldly at the scene below. From their words, she knew that Kihara Kagun, no, Bersi was truly dead. Having accepted this fact, Marian stumbled and leaned on the wall of the container.

"Is, that…a joke…?"

After hearing that muttering, the people near Bersi turned around. However, Marian Slingeneyer didn't care. No matter how hostile the others looked, what she could only see was that man that was being buried by snow.

"Why, why did you think that you won't die? Or rather, I taught you my skills to prevent that from happening. Why, why is this? It, it's like you suddenly died when you're about to finish the jigsaw puzzle!!"

Perhaps such wavering was completely unexpected for her.

For this Gremlin magician who was able to modify live humans and turn them into her own weapons.

But that wasn't all.

She could do lots of inhumane things to many people, but to put it, that was to clearly define who were her friends or foes. She could help her enemies, she could betray her friends, but these vague things had nothing to do with this. Marian Slingeneyer was the sort of person who would wreck the entire world for the sake of those she recognized as her allies.

"Me? Did I nudge you down this path…? No, that's not it. You're not this sort of person. Even if I didn't teach you, you would take a different path to complete this jigsaw. You're that sort of person! It's because you're that sort of person that I wanted to avoid you! Even though I did manage to do this!!"

Marian clearly faced this.

Her partner's death.

"What's this, this..."

No.

Even when she faced this directly, she couldn't accept it.

"WHY IS THIS SSOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!"

A sudden change occurred.

Suddenly, *mishimishigishigishi*, in the place around that was supposed to be empty, something rang.

The smartphone Marian Slingeneyer was holding onto rang. She didn't receive it, but it switched to a magic message.

Othinus.

The name of the main god in Norse mythology. The voice of Gremlin's Magic God rang.

"YOU CAN'T DO THAT, MARIAN!! YOU'RE USING TOO MUCH FORCE! THE EXPERIMENTS UP UNTIL NOW WILL CRUMBLE IF YOU KEEP THIS UP!!"

"*...You're irritating.*"

She whispered.

She said that with a vengeful tone, and even ignored the Magic God.

"*If I had used my strength in the beginning, this wouldn't have happened. If a Magic God like you appeared in this world, Bersi wouldn't have died. And so would I.*"

"You...don't tell me, you're going to use that!?"

"*Of course I'm going to. Don't I have to use it? It's too late to do anything, so let's just back away like this and end everything!!* ***SO WHAT ABOUT THE EXPERIMENTS? SO WHAT ABOUT GREMLIN? SO WHAT ABOUT A MAGIC GOD!? AH!? HOW CAN I SWALLOW THIS WITHOUT KILLING OFF EVERYONE IN BAGGAGE CITY THAT KILLED BERSSSSSIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII!!!***"

Marian Slingeneyer roared as she reached for her overalls.

She didn't draw out the golden tool.

She drew out a sheathed sword.

Dáinsleif.

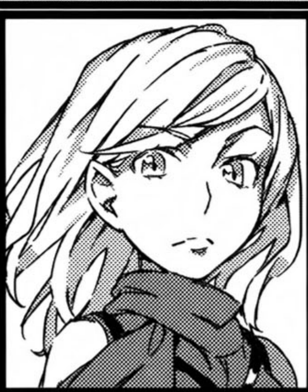
In the Norse mythology, it was one of the signs of the final war, Ragnarök. It was a legendary magic sword where humanity could start a war to continue Ragnarök and continue to bring the greatest devastation by swinging it.

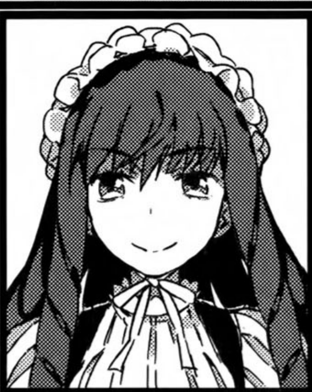
The creator knew more than anyone how terrifying it was, hence its name. But at this moment, she grabbed the scabbard of the sword without hesitation.

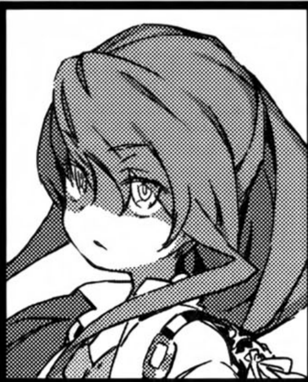
She held onto it hard, and shouted,

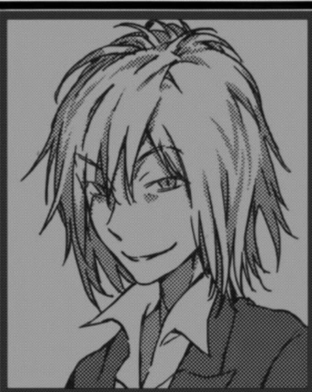
"*Now, state your wills.* ***I'LL USE THESE MILLIONS OF SKULLS OF YOURS AS PART OF BERSI'S GRAVE!!!***"

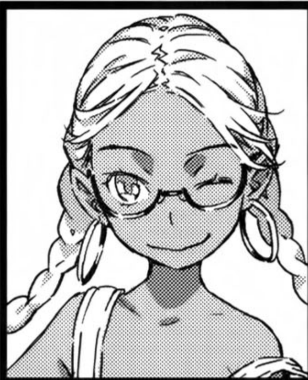
Key persons of “Baggage City”

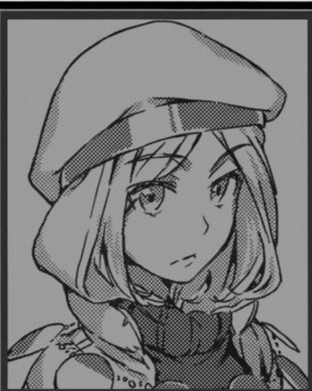

Natural Selector competitor
Saflee Opendays

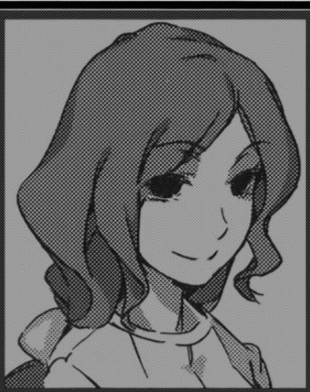

Academy City's maid girl
Kumokawa Maria

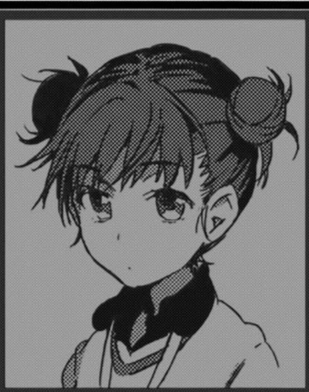

Natural Selector competitor
Oumi Shuri

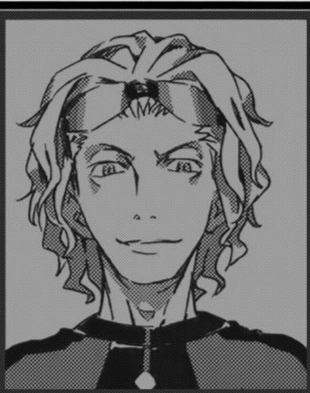

GREMLIN's official member
Útgarða-Loki

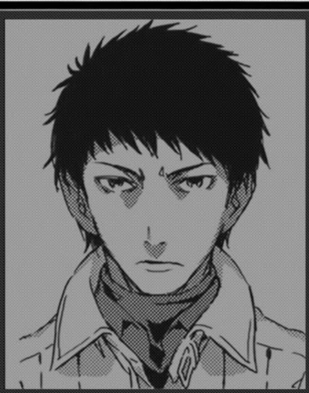

GREMLIN's official member
Marian Slingeneyer


GREMLIN's official member
Sigyn


Kihara family
Kihara Byouri


Kihara family
Kihara Enshuu


Kihara family
Kihara Ransuu


Helmeted Man
Kihara Kagun

CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

Key persons of “Baggage City”

SUB.33

Kihara Kagun met Marian Slingeneyer three years prior. At the time, World War III had yet to happen, so of course the category of Gremlin did not yet exist as it was created by the war.

In a way, Kihara Kagun may have been closer to Marian Slingeneyer than just a Gremlin magician.

“Well, I had known him for a long time like Mjölnir. I knew that he would not eat raw shellfish.”

At the time, Marian had not been creating the weapons of the gods. She had been trying to improve the tools of the Dvergr. Just like the steam engine caused the industrial revolution and explosively changed the level of war, she hoped the improvement of their tools would let the world know about the power and techniques of the Dvergr that were on the verge of extinction.

She searched for the skilled people she needed for her goal and the one she chose was the wandering Kihara Kagun.

And as a result…

“I do not understand how these techniques work and *therefore* I cannot work up any personal interest in them. But from what I can see, you have already perfected a golden ratio as far as equipment goes. I could add in the Kihara that I know, but that would only lower the purity.”

That was what Kihara Kagun had said.

But then, gently pointing out the mistaken objective someone had dedicated their life to was a certain type of talent. Especially when it was to a failure like Marian Slingeneyer. In that way, Kihara Kagun’s previous occupation may have been visible.

Marian Slingeneyer directly taught Kihara Kagun very little.

Just by having the existence of magic proven to him, Kihara Kagun then put together spells and the means of refining magic power almost entirely on his own.

Marian Slingeneyer gave the following complaint to Mjölnir.

"He's not worth teaching. There are tons of things I could teach him, but when I teach him even one thing according to the textbook, it becomes something else within him. In the end, having him learn things on his own is the only way. All I can do is correct things. I guess you could say I can't give him the power to fire a missile, but I can correct the trajectory of a falling bomb with its tail. …Ha ha. I think he infected me with those science analogies."

When they joined Gremlin, Kihara Kagun's contributions were primarily as a heretical researcher of the science side rather than as a magician. Whenever Gremlin magicians used scientific technology, Kihara Kagun's knowledge was at the base of it. Most likely, his knowledge would remain after his death and function as a major power within Gremlin.

In the end, Kihara Kagun had been unable to escape even after leaving Academy City.

He had left Academy City in search of some new power, but how powerful a magician was he?

If you had asked Marian Slingeneyer, her evaluation of him would have been as follows.

"He may be strong, but he's completely useless."

For one thing, he wished for his own destruction. He developed his spells for the sake of not winning, not losing, but carrying out the perfect tie against his one mortal enemy. Even within Gremlin which was made up of many twisted magicians, no one made use of the methods he came up with. They were too dangerous to touch. That was how everyone viewed them.

In truth, Marian Slingeneyer had intentionally drawn Kihara Kagun into Gremlin.

He had been necessary not as a magician but as a scientist and she had thought that would put an end to his reckless (that was the only way she could view it) desire for revenge.

But it did not work.

Kihara Kagun had indeed become very busy as one of the few science oriented cores of Gremlin, but in his spare time he still improved his spells, learned from the techniques of the other magicians, and further intensified his already dangerous magic.

Most likely, he would have carried out his revenge no matter what.

Even if he was looking at a cute baby bird, he would likely have been thinking about how he could use it to carry out his revenge.

Seeing that, Marian Slingeneyer changed her tactics. His revenge would not be stopped. So she would support him with everything she had and make him overwhelmingly strong. She strengthened him so that he could return safely even if he carried out his reckless revenge. That way, she could change the result of the revenge he was planning.

She had thought that would suffice.

She had thought she could save her comrade from his delusions of revenge.

“If your revenge is over and you’ve survived and have nothing left, you can come back to me.”

Marian Slingeneyer had constantly said that as if it was a joke.

However, it was not a joke at all.

Kihara Kagun had always given a vague smile in response but he had never once nodded.

He had already made up his mind.

She had changed nothing.

She had not saved him.

In the end, Marian Slingeneyer had only been able to watch her comrade head off to his death.

Kihara Kagun had carried out his revenge that brought an end to everything that had caused that incident, including himself.

As such, she would do the same.

Even if it had no meaning.

Even if it would save no one there.

Marian Slingeneyer bared her fangs at everything that had led to that man’s death, including herself.

A_CARDINAL_ERROR.34

The trio — Kumokawa Maria, Oumi Shuri and Saflee Opendays — noticed this change.

A new figure that appeared like a shadow.

Marian Slingeneyer.

It was hard to tell where she was hurt. She was dragging a leg, and her eye was barely covered by gauze. Anyone would feel pained to see that.

However,

What was worth noticing wasn't her appearance.

Kumokawa Maria saw that she was holding the scabbard with a Western-styled sword in it and immediately thought,

(This is bad.)

She had fought against opponents who could use inexplicable powers and powers that didn't follow the norm, but that sword was giving off such pressure that even Kumokawa Maria was shocked.

Amidst the hill of plant factory containers, Kumokawa Maria's throat cried out,

"…Doesn't look like we can talk peacefully here."

"This is a dangerous place."

Oumi Shuri murmured.

She had once forced Marian Slingeneyer to retreat, but she realized that the values back then weren't worth referencing.

That sword had some existence that caused her to have this thought.

On it.

"But that's the shape of a sword. The attack range is already limited. First, we run off in 3 directions to divert the enemy's target. Once one of us gets chased, the other two can attack from the blind spots. We'll still have a chance of winning."

"Do we need a flying device? I'm not used to this."

Saflee was smiling so casually that it was intriguing, but it would be the best move if they could suggest it to themselves. They would really end up dead if they couldn't move due to fear.

Kumokawa Maria's eyes were locked onto Marian. She grabbed Saflee beside her to ask,

"What can we use?"

"You haven't reached the realm of martial arts, so I don't really want to take it out, but if it's a hunting tool made in Australia…"

"Boomerang?"

"Simpler than that. We would tie rocks on both ends of a thin rope and use centrifugal force to throw it out. This is something that's used to bind birds' feet together, but it can be used to aim at human brains."

"Centrifugal force, is it?"

Kumokawa Maria muttered,

"…Then it certainly matches my ability."

"Ojou-chan?"

Saflee asked Oumi Shuri, and she spun the gardening trowel-type kunai gently in her hands before saying,

"As for me, from a country where guns and gunpowder came in late, this would be extremely advanced. Speaking of which, this thing here's about to rust after we imported those things."

They decided their plan.

No matter what the enemy did, they had to run away from her attack range.

It was a basic thing, but everything was a matter of life and death, whether it be the control of distance or the fight to determine the winner. And no matter how it started, no matter what destructive power that sword had, once they had thrown out that flying tool, it would definitely cause damage to the enemy.

They could then win like that.

If we don't run off in the wrong direction, if we don't run into a dead end made by the containers of the plant factories, we'll have a chance of winning.

Just like that. Kumokawa Maria and company forced themselves to focus and try to be positive. But to that,

"Fill."

Marian Slingeneyer said this.

She casually raised the sword that was still sheathed.

Just like that.

She turned all their hopes to nothing.

GONNKK!!!

Lightning came down from the sky and went through the golden sword.

An explosion occurred.

With Marian Slingeneyer at the center, a large flash erupted as shockwaves went in all directions. The asphalt shook mysteriously, and this instability caused the plant factory containers to collapse like they were critically hit. The snow danced around, and they were blown away by the shockwave. Whether it was Kumokawa Maria, Oumi Shuri or Saflee Opendays, they were already worn out trying to quickly raise their hands to protect their bodies.

"Wh, at…?"

The sky was distorted.

It wasn't as simple as the thick clouds that were sending down snow scattering away.

It was true that one could see the round clear sky as the clouds were blown aside. But before that, what should have been a blue-colored sky changed abnormally. It was like a TV set with the screen jumping about. There was an obvious instability.

That flash.

It looked like it had come from a different dimension as it broke through the clear sky.

"What, is that…?"

“*Your brains alone won’t be able to understand that.*”

Marian said angrily.

Then, the golden sword was raised above her head, and the sheath let out a mysterious bluish-white spark.

It’s coming.

Kumokawa Maria had a disastrous premonition for unknown reasons and quickly ran as she shouted at Oumi Shuri and Saflee Opendays,

“SCATTER AWAY!! THE ENEMY’S USING A SWORD!! IF WE CAN DISTRACT HER ACCORDING TO PLAN…!!”

She didn’t even have the time to finish her words.

Marian Slingeneyer merely used the thumb holding the sheath of the sword and easily pushed the sword’s guard.

Merely several millimeters.

Just like that.

There wasn’t any horrifying light, and there wasn’t any huge explosion that couldn’t be resisted. She didn’t carry out such a distinct attack.

However,

Several millimeters alone were enough to show the true face of that blade.

DOONNNKKK!!!

She didn’t even do anything, but Oumi Shuri’s heart stopped.

“Eh…?”

Beside her, Kumokawa Maria couldn’t understand what happened.

Suddenly, Oumi Shuri went limp and collapsed on the white snow. There were no signs of bleeding or fractures. It was a state where it was believable that she could be in a coma. However, this was -20 degrees Celsius of hell. It would be obvious if she could breathe white air from her mouth. Obviously, Oumi Shuri had stopped breathing. Stopped by someone.

(Wh, y? She’s dead…? Really, just like that, so simply!? What happened? Is it poison gas? No, we’re facing the wind here. It’s impossible to do such little actions in this situation…!!)

Kink. With that sound,

It was the sound of Marian Slingeneyer moving her fingers and sheathing the sword.

She then raised her right hand straight and pointed the sheath like a lunge.

She didn't say anything.

And the thing that was sealed inside the sheath, that thing filled with calamity was again about to open.

"Damn…damn it!! I don't know what's going on, but we have to find some place to hide…!!"

Kumokawa Maria's words were interrupted midway through.

At this moment, Saflee Opendays, whose eyes were wide, slowly collapsed into the snow. Her heart stopped. She died in the actual sense. The human life, and the pride with it were all taken away so simply.

The demon of several millimeters.

The thing that could be seen between the sheath and the guard, the golden blade flashing with red light.

"…"

Kink. The soft sound rang abnormally.

It was the sound of Marian Slingeneyer sheathing the sword silently.

Absolutely abnormal.

Such difference.

This wasn't at a level they could handle by simply using wits and planning. In the end, they couldn't even get ready for battle. The sword Marian Slingeneyer had was way too destructive.

Then.

Marian went silent and pointed the sheath at Kumokawa Maria.

The sword was sheathed in, and both sides kept their distance. Strictly speaking, she wasn't actually being pointed at, but Kumokawa Maria naturally felt that she was aimed at.

It felt like there was a lump in her throat.

It felt like a needle was pierced into her from behind and obstructed her movements.

As she faced the enemy, Kumokawa Maria finally noticed.

She finally noticed it.

What exactly had caused Oumi Shuri and Saflee Opendays' hearts to stop.

The reason.

"…Don't tell me, this sword did something."

Kumokawa Maria widened her eyes and blankly muttered.

Marian Slingeneyer hadn't drawn her sword. Even so, that existence continued to enter Kumokawa Maria's body. Or rather, she tried to mutter out its true identity.

"It's just that we felt fear. We didn't want to stand before that golden sword before it activated its ability. In such a situation, it was a good thing that the heart stopped before something worse happened."

"A full 100 marks."

This wasn't the same type as the high level horror Kihara Enshuu used theoretically to increase its effect. It was instinct, or her soul, at work. Anyway, it was fear that was coming out from those primitive yet inexplicable places. Because of that, this was already far more than what the brain could consider.

She couldn't dodge it.

Once she had the ability to sense the terror, that terror will erase all evidence of life.

In that case,

That sword had the effect of killing all humans in the world before it was unsheathed.

Then,

In that case, if, just if, that sword was unsheathed, what would happen…?

"Then, it's about time."

Marian Slingeneyer moved her lips.

Her thumb was placed on the guard of the golden sword.

"Die, culprit."

The blade in the sheath started to move like it was sliding out. She could see the edge. The sword that could make people realize that resistance would be more horrifying than death. Kumokawa Maria couldn't do anything. That was the climax of the fear. Whether she's to run away or close her eyes, these little actions were already sealed.

Clearly,
something
strange
is
happening.

"...Ah?"

Kumokawa Maria's consciousness was fading. She couldn't connect the memories before and after. The scene in front of her was dyed bright red. The feeling of up and down vanished. She could feel neither hot nor cold. She just stood in a dazed manner as if everyone were as messy as a bowl of gruel.

Then, she noticed.

She couldn't be certain of what happened, but the fact that Kumokawa Maria could raise doubts showed that she was alive. It wasn't the fear of being unable to think that caused the heart to stop. For some reason, Marian Slingeneyer's sword didn't move. No, in the end, she didn't know what the sword itself did. It was just that Kumokawa Maria herself inadvertently felt fear and gave up on living.

Kumokawa Maria's consciousness focused on the place outside the sword.

It was a stranger phenomenon.

Because of that, her fear was weakened and slower, which allowed her to avoid death.

Then, what was this?

The reason was at some place inches from Marian Slingeneyer.

BINK!!!

Pitch black cracks were ripped from what should be empty space.

And then, from there.

A certain boy's right hand shot out.

“Tch!”

Marian Slingeneyer’s face changed for the first time as she showed an obvious anxious look. She had such a powerful sword. Even with a sword with such power, the boy’s right hand was grabbing onto Marian’s hand that was holding onto the sword. She seemed to be wary that her weapon was about to be taken as she frantically waved her hand and pulled her distance back from the black crack drastically.

“…I finally caught up.”

The boy’s voice came from the swinging hand.

“It may be too late, and it took me a lot of time to get in here. Even so, I’ve caught up to you, Gremlin. You told me the coordinates of this distorted space you created. Since I’ve caught up, I won’t let you do as you please. My right hand has the destructive power to destroy what you control.”

The black crack expanded.

Something seemed to be looking over from there.

“That’s the line. Up ‘till now, it’s all been a world managed by your rules.”

It expanded, expanded, expanded.

It seemed as if it wanted to deny something, that it wanted to topple the premise.

“So now.”

He took a step forward from the crack that had increasingly opened.

And he clearly stepped into this world.

“**Now, we’re going to finish things by my rules!!!**”

Kamijou Touma appeared.

Immediately after, all the other cracks that were embedded shattered.

It was as if…

It was as if everything Kumokawa Maria had witnessed up to this point was just a grand illusion.

CONNECTION PROCESS

The scientific psychic powers developed by Academy City had their base in quantum theory. In quantum theory, the world was thought about at an exceedingly small level and it was a strange field in which Newtonian mechanics such as an apple falling to the earth when you let it go did not apply.

The object was definitely there, but it went somewhere else when observed by someone.

An object in a box could only be expressed in possibility or probability. It was not said to be there or said to be not there. It could only be said to 70% exist.

If you thought about it in the terms of the normal world of science such as in terms of drink cans or oranges, the ideas of quantum theory made no sense whatsoever. However, if you controlled the microscopic world with the observer of a human mind, the macroscopic world (that is, what could be seen with the naked eye) could be controlled. That was what Academy City's psychic powers were.

However, there was another theory that was the counter to the microscopic quantum theory.

Holism.

In that theory, the entire expanding universe was treated as a single large system or network and things were viewed at the largest scale that humans could manage.

This once branched off to Gaia Theory which viewed the entire Earth as a single environment or ecosystem, but the life forms on the Earth were also affected by solar winds and the gravitational pull of the moon. If you also added in the time axis and other dimensions to that large 'world', you were no longer dealing with just a single planet. In that way, many had gone back to the origins of the theory and talking in true wholes once more.

Gremlin had used Baggage City as a giant testing ground to complete the foundational theory behind psychic powers that used that holism.

The theory itself was simple.

It was the opposite of the butterfly effect that said the beating of a butterfly's wings could cause storms.

In other words, a major change on the global scale could cause flames to come from your palm.

Just saying that the large affected the small may make it a little hard to understand.

However, we are constantly undergoing changes caused by large things.

For example, take the theory of relativity.

Setting aside the precise definition, let us focus on the part that says the flow of time slows the closer an object gets to the speed of light.

A human riding in a car and a human riding in an airplane are in different 'times' that would cause a slight immeasurable error.

So let us make the scale larger.

What about a human on Earth versus a human on the moon? What about a human on the moon versus a human on Mars? Due to rotation and revolution, those people would be within different speeds and therefore different times.

Now let us bring the scale up to the whole.

The universe was created in the Big Bang and is constantly expanding moment by moment. Of course, we of humanity live in the universe and are all moving at the speed of that expansion. This puts us in the relativistic time created by the Big Bang.

Now, let us go through a thought experiment.

The universe is expanding equally in every direction, but what if the expansion speed of a single local area changed?

The change in speed would create a change in time.

An exceedingly large phenomenon would change the concept of time for a tiny human.

Of course, that is merely an example.

However, if you could bend or ball up the entire universe, the side effect of that power would cause an exceedingly microscopic phenomenon that would be immeasurable even with an electron microscope.

Does it seem like a rather roundabout method?

Do you think that if someone had power great enough to alter the expansion speed of the universe, they should just use that power to directly crush the planet or the galaxy?

However, a holistic esper would only notice the flames coming from their palm. Even if some distant galaxy was crushed in the process, that would be all they could comprehend. Just like how a person in a car cannot notice that someone standing on the Earth is in a different time.

As such, an esper created from the whole might only reach a Level 2 or 3 on Academy City's scale. Even if some truly ridiculous thing was occurring in reality, no one would notice it, so it might as well not have been happening. Ironically, this was the same as the concept of zero in quantum theory.

What Gremlin had been doing was the first step toward that.

Before actually creating a holistic esper, they were carrying out an experiment to see if a small supernatural phenomenon would occur when the world was greatly distorted.

That's right.

The tournament in Baggage City, the clash between Kihara and Gremlin, and the war between science and magic. Each of those movements was nothing more than an experiment to see if the exceedingly large scale battles would cause exceedingly microscopic changes.

For Gremlin, the 'punishment' sent by Academy City was just another part of their plan. Kihara Kagun was from Academy City and had been a central part of their darkness. He had secretly intercepted the scope of the unit sent in by Academy City. With that knowledge, he had carried out final adjustments to give Gremlin the advantage.

That scenario had been hidden even from Gremlin. If they had known the scenario beforehand, they could not achieve the same results.

It was all an experiment to develop psychic powers from the result of the battles.

If they succeeded, it would not only be the most powerful, it would be a brand new system of powers.

The type of experiment was the same as what the #1 had once gone through. Since that was the result he had eventually come up with, Kihara Kagun may have never truly escaped the curse of the science of Academy City's dark side no matter how much he hated it.

(But then, when he found out Kihara Byouri would be part of the strategy, he took advantage of the fact that he could not tell anyone else the scenario and made a major change to the plan at the last second.)

If the small phenomenon caused by the major distortion was detected, they would finally alter a hopeful candidate's brain to develop an actual holistic esper.

So what was the result?

The result was clear.

Since Kamijou Touma's right hand had negated something, something needing to be negated must have been there.

Let us take Kamijou and the other's proper 'present' as 0 and the 'future' created by the holistic experiment as 1.

Gremlin surely thought they were controlling a holistic experiment. Until partway through, that was true. Gremlin's major preparations in Baggage City had indeed created a result in their experiment to show that a distortion that should not exist leads to psychic powers.

However, when the small distortion had appeared, Gremlin and Baggage City which were in the 'present' had begun to be forcibly drawn in by the holistic result in the 'future'. It was like scientists losing control of the black hole they had created.

And so things became distorted.

If the 'present' was 0 and the 'future' was 1, then, until Kamijou had arrived, Baggage City (which should have been a 0) had been drawn in and the time and space had been distorted toward the future making it a 0.5 or a 0.7.

That was why something had been off about the place in which Kihara and Gremlin clashed despite the fact that it should have been Baggage City.

The *normal laws* did not apply and they began to be bound by *some strange laws that made tragedies occur much more easily*.

At the same time, what did it mean that that distortion had been destroyed by the power of that right hand?

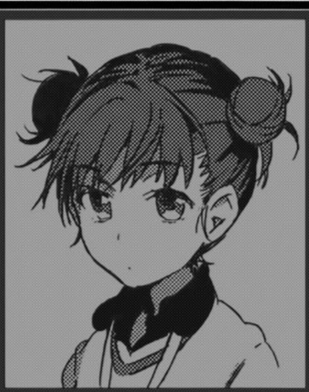
The answer was simple.

The cold laws that had taken effect no longer applied.

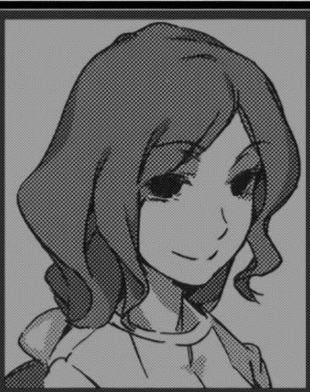
Even if the tragedies that had occurred could not be repaired and even if those that had died could not be brought back to life…

Kamijou Touma's right hand would do the conquering now.

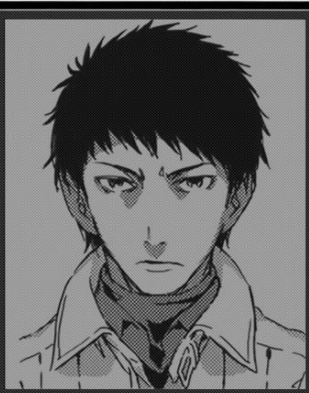
Key persons of “Baggage City”



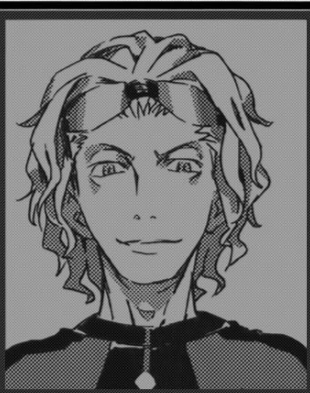
Kihara family
Kihara Enshuu



Kihara family
Kihara Byouri



Helmeted Man
Kihara Kagun



Kihara family
Kihara Ransuu

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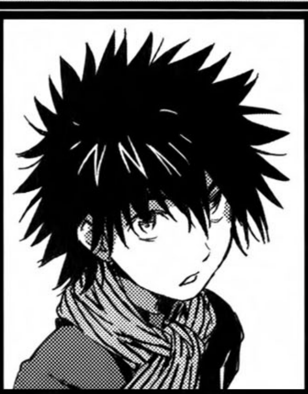
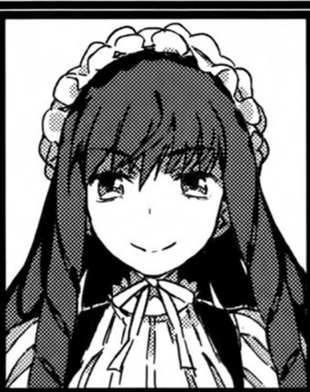
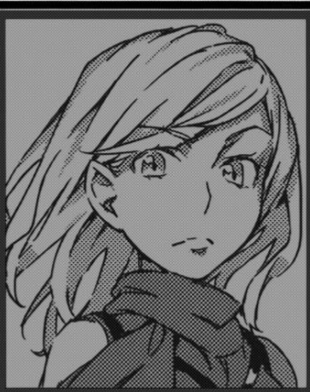


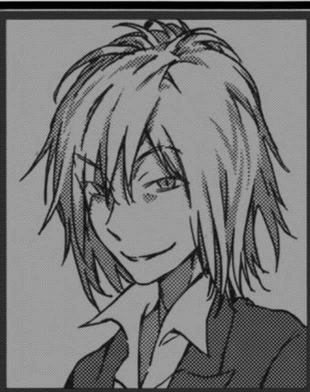
Kamijou Touma



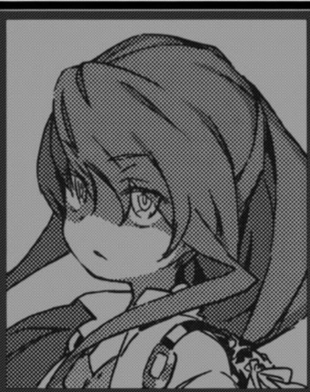
Academy City’s maid girl
Kumokawa Maria



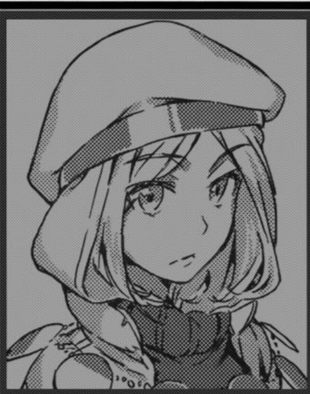
Natural Selector competitor
Saflee Opendays



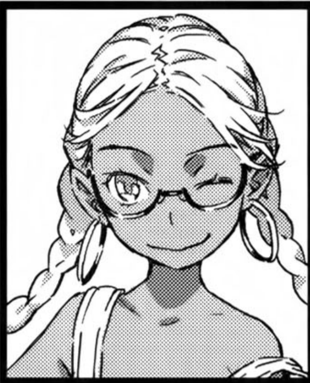
GREMLIN’s official member
Útgarða-Loki



Natural Selector competitor
Oumi Shuri



GREMLIN’s official member
Sigyn



GREMLIN’s official member
Marian Slingeneyer

Key persons of “Baggage City”

CHAPTER N

Even if There is Death.

Dead_to...

Part 1

Kumokawa Maria witnessed it.

What remained beyond after the world shattered like glass was the Eastern European Baggage City. However, it was different from before. The oppressive reek of death was gone. The weight that Kihara and Gremlin had scattered about was gone from her shoulders.

The world had changed.

By the presence of a single boy.

Other than those invisible changes, a more obvious visual change occurred as well. They were no longer outside in the piles of plant factory containers. They were inside one of the domed facilities. They were in one of the four arenas where the Natural Selector tournament was originally supposed to take place. In the ring surrounded by chain link fence stood Kamijou Touma, Marian Slingeneyer, and Kumokawa Maria.

“What...just...?”

“It isn’t an issue of which is correct. Both the place you were in up until now and the place you are in now are the same place in terms of coordinates. However, *the same location’s position shifted from before and after as if space itself had been distorted by a black hole*.”

The spectators were not there.

Other than Kamijou and the two girls, no one was in the domed facility. It had not been that way all along. Clear signs of people having left in a panic could be seen such as pamphlets scattered about and crushed by many feet. Had they all fled at once or had they been unable to make it in time causing some tragedy to occur? Kumokawa Maria could only speculate.

“...”

Marian Slingeneyer remained silent.

The ominous sword Dáinsleif rested within its golden scabbard. Just by lifting the guard with her thumb and revealing only a few centimeters of the blade, that thorough weapon would cause its target's heart to automatically stop out of fear. She held the right arm holding the scabbard casually forward.

Even though not even a millimeter of the blade could be seen, Kumokawa Maria's body stiffened.

Ignoring Kumokawa, Marian said, "Why are you here *now*?"

"This was the best I could manage."

"Bersi is…Kihara Kagun is dead."

"I cannot deny that I was unable to stop that. There is nothing I can say."

Even though Gremlin had started the incident and had been deeply related to that man's death in a way, Marian Slingeneyer separated herself out from that as she spoke.

It may have been because she understood what kind of person Kamijou Touma was.

Gremlin had put together countermeasures against Imagine Breaker, so she had known Kamijou Touma's nature before ever meeting him. Because she knew his nature, *Marian may have been blaming something else other than Kamijou Touma himself for the fact that there had been someone he was unable to save.*

However, Marian Slingeneyer did not hesitate.

As if cursing him, she did not hesitate to push up the magic sword's guard with her thumb.

That ominous blade rose just a few centimeters.

Its seal was broken and it was displayed to the world.

Kumokawa Maria was not being directly targeted, but her heart still jumped.

That was not the true power of Dáinsleif. The target merely stopped their own heart because it would be better than being hit by the full power of the blade. How was one supposed to stand up to an attack on that level?

No physical projectile came from the sword.

It could not be evaded if you were quick enough or blocked by hiding behind cover.

No matter where you ran or what you did to defend, the fear welling up within your own body would automatically kill you. So you could not run. You could not defend. Nothing you did held any meaning. You were dead before you could do anything. You were dead the second you stood on the same battlefield.

All actions were robbed of all meaning.

All fighting lost its reason to exist.

As he was being directly targeted, Kamijou Touma's heart should surely have stopped. Before Dáinsleif could actually do anything and before the sword could enter the battle directly. No reason was needed. That sword gave its target an instinctual fear that robbed them of all life. It should have completely killed that normal boy without leaving a scratch on him.

And yet…

He did not fall.

Kamijou Touma did not fall.

Even as he stood before Dáinsleif, the sword that would bring ruin to the world.

He pushed aside his fear and his heart continued to function normally.

Marian Slingeneyer frowned slightly.

In response, Kamijou Touma held up his right fist.

He would use it to deal with Marian as she held out that sheathed magic sword.

"That attack is triggered by the fear of that powerful magic, so it will not work on me. I know that magic is not something that will hit me no matter what. With the power of my right hand…no, as long as I have the will to clench my fist, I can brush aside or negate it."

He could destroy magic.

He could break illusions.

Because he knew that, the fear was mitigated some. He was not merely on the receiving end. He knew he had a 50/50 chance of resisting, so he did not have to choose the option of giving up before fighting. That was why Kamijou Touma was able to fight. He could still stand up to that ultimate magic sword that would bring about the final battle of Norse mythology, Ragnarök.

And meanwhile, Kumokawa Maria realized something else.

She was able to calmly watch on. She had not fallen into confusion that bound her with the overwhelming fear produced by that magic sword. Kumokawa Maria did not know who that boy was and she did not know what Imagine Breaker was. However, *the mere possibility of something that might be able to stand up to that magic sword* was enough to lessen her fear and allow her heart to continue to beat.

She had been protected.

She had been saved.

She had been rescued.

Most likely, Oumi Shuri, Saflee Opendays, and the others who were not there had begun breathing again without Kumokawa Maria knowing. Something had appeared to force back the fear. Kumokawa Maria and the others' hearts had not stopped due to an injury or an illness. Without the fear that had conquered Baggage City, they could return to their normal state.

That was Kamijou Touma.

That was Imagine Breaker.

He had not done anything special. Just by being there – just by standing there – he had naturally avoided a tragedy and saved someone.

A safe zone.

A protagonist.

"…So what?" muttered Marian Slingeneyer.

An unnatural creaking noise came from the golden scabbard as she tightened her grip on it.

"Bersi is dead. He died like a different type of protagonist than you. So I will respect his intent! You looked down on and denied this temporary cruel world and the actions of Bersi who died satisfied!! I will destroy all of those kind rules of yours!!"

If Kamijou Touma had been there from the beginning, Bersi aka Kihara Kagun may not have died. He may have been able to resolve his issues without dying.

She rejected that possibility.

In order to construct the opinion that it was for the best that Bersi had died, she did all she could to negate the existence of Kamijou Touma, the one who shook Bersi's great accomplishment.

Kamijou Touma had his rules and Gremlin had its rules.

This was a battle between them.

Marian Slingeneyer knew that she could never actually give anything to the dead, but she still held up the sheathed magic sword for her lost friend.

“Let us begin this, different one. Battles over the dead are serious. After all, the dead cannot put a stop to the expanding malice of the survivor!!”

A storm of rage blew out in every direction from the brown girl. At the same time, the magic sword emitted its power of fear as a great pressure that bound the soldiers that controlled the battlefield. However, as Kumokawa Maria felt that change, she heard Kamijou Touma mutter something.

“...I know. Even so, I have continued to fight this kind of fanatic.”

And then the battle began.

It began in that world where it was already too late for everything. It began even as no path remained upon which everyone could return home safely.

The fight began between one who wished to protect the sanctity of the dead and one who wished to stop any more tragedy from occurring.

Natural Selector.

Ironically, the final battlefield was the stage prepared for the tournament named after the one who decided natural selection.

Part 2

The circular ring had a diameter of 30 meters.

Inside it, Kamijou Touma and Marian Slingeneyer faced each other at a distance of about 10 meters.

The fear of Marian’s Dáinsleif would no longer work. Only a true clash remained.

Kamijou had to get within range of his right fist to get any damage in.

The two of them would have to get in close range.

“…?”

However, that did not happen.

While Kamijou tried to charge in, Marian actually moved back.

She then held the magic sword forward while it was still in its scabbard.

A small noise could be heard.

It was not the sound of her thumb pressing up on the guard. It was the opposite. It was the sound of the few centimeters of exposed blade being returned into the scabbard.

That was a sign that she was giving up on the now useless fear.

It was also a ritual for releasing the magic sword’s other power.

A slight wind ignored the flow of the air and headed toward Marian from all directions.

Immediately afterwards, a giant sword sliced through the chain link fence surrounding the ring.

It seemed to fly out from the bottom of Dáinsleif’s scabbard. The long straight sword was gray and narrow. It tore through the chain link fence behind Kamijou.

As Marian swung the still sheathed sword, the long, narrow blade followed suit.

It moved.

It tore through everything.

“Tch!!”

Kamijou stopped running and focused on defense. The large sword came flying horizontally for his neck and he immediately held up his right hand and tried to negate Marian’s magic.

However, he noticed something partway through.

The end of the little finger on his right hand was slightly cut.

The meaning of the few drops of blood was clear.

“I can’t block it with Imagine Breaker…!!”

"Didn't we tell you we have countermeasures?"

He forcefully stopped the action he had started to take and felt his backbone and muscles straining as he did so, but Kamijou managed to change what he was doing. He swung his upper body to lower his overall posture.

The large gray sword passed directly above him.

The chain link fence behind him was torn to shreds, but the blade did not follow him for long. The large sword must have only been able to last about 3 seconds.

However, Marian Slingeneyer's attacks did not end there.

If one attack had its limits, then she just had to attack again and again.

(Shit!! I shouldn't have stopped moving for defense. It has too much range to defend against well and getting in close and unleashing a barrage is my only option!!)

Marian's slicing attacks continued. Each individual trajectory was simple, but the range and power were incredible. The background was sliced to pieces like someone had taken a pair of scissors to a photograph.

However, Kamijou received no fatal blows.

The destruction had spread through the chain link fence, the concrete floor, and even the spectator seats. Dust flew up into the air.

That dust showed a strange silhouette.

It showed the source of Marian Slingeneyer's power. It showed the process by which the gray swords were created and a hint as to how to avoid it.

Marian's attacks stopped for an instant as she looked around and realized the mistake she had made.

"...That scabbard," muttered Kamijou during the break in the attacks.

A clear sphere with a diameter of about 3 meters had appeared at the end of the magic sword's scabbard. It looked something like a giant balloon, but it was likely something completely different.

"I don't know what effect it has, but that scabbard has enough power to seal a sword as dangerous as that. If you changed what it sealed, you could bind something else. For example..."

"Gravity?" said Marian. "That power is felt equally across the earth and cannot be escaped from. As long as it is on earth, this sphere will rapidly absorb gravity. It is reflected around within the sphere where an apple will not fall down if you let go of it. As the power violently rages around within the sphere that has no exit, I just need to open a small hole at a single point."

"So you collect the vectors in a single point and send them directly out. And the sphere has the dust and dirt from the air wrapped up in it all. That's like the machine tools used to cut steel plates by firing high pressure water with artificial diamond dust mixed in!!"

The three meter clear sphere suddenly compressed to the size of a golf ball. A large gray sword fired out, slicing through the vaguely visible dust. Kamijou twisted his body with all his strength. Only the clear sphere that was a magical extension of the scabbard was magical in nature. The large swords fired from it were merely a physical phenomenon created by the distorted flow of gravity pushing the dust and dirt. That was why Imagine Breaker could not defend against it. If he held up his right hand, it would just be severed.

However, Marian betrayed his expectations and did not swing the blade around.

Instead she charged straight toward him with the sheathed magic sword after he had ruined his form to evade. She reached him in no time at all. Rather than the long distance attack with just the scabbard, this was the more natural form of attack. The much more dangerous attack came for him.

Without creating a gravity sword, Marian swung the sheathed magic sword in one hand from the bottom right to the upper left. The end of scabbard was aimed for Kamijou's temple.

If one of the large swords was produced at that range of only a few centimeters, Kamijou's entire body would be sliced in two. Kamijou used reason to suppress the urge to protect his face with his arm out of pure fear and he focused on evading.

Suddenly, he was surrounded by darkness in every direction.

Kamijou's thoughts fell into chaos.

Nothingness surrounded him.

Immediately afterwards, he realized what had happened.

(This time, it wasn't the air. Was I sealed inside the sphere!?)

Next, either the gravity would increase and crush him from all sides or he would be squeezed out of the small opening for energy and turned into human pasta.

That meant his only option was to destroy the sphere.

The large swords created by gravity were one thing, but the sphere extended from the scabbard could be destroyed by his right hand.

However, with only darkness surrounding him, he had no idea how wide the sphere was. Marian's attack could begin before he managed to run to the edge of the sphere.

Kamijou wanted speed.

He did not look around.

He aimed directly down.

No matter how far the sphere had expended, his feet would be on the bottom of the sphere. So Kamijou crouched down and struck the ground beneath his feet with his right fist.

The darkness around him shattered.

The torn up circular ring returned to Kamijou's vision. The great change to his surroundings threw his vision into chaos.

Marian Slingeneyer approached.

The hand not holding the scabbard was swinging a gold saw down toward Kamijou's head as he crouched.

His right hand moved.

The human-altering spiritual item shattered to pieces and the light-reflecting fragments flew through the air.

And Marian smiled.

As Kamijou Touma raised his right hand above his head, she looked toward his unguarded body.

She tightened her grip on Dáinsleif's scabbard.

A three meter clear sphere appeared from the end of the scabbard and it filled with the dust, dirt, and gravity used to create the large swords. Kamijou frantically tried to stand up, but he did not finish the action.

It would be over in the next blow.

With the appearance of the next large sword, Kamijou Touma's body would be bisected between top and bottom.

Part 3

A bit before, Kumokawa Maria could do nothing but watch Kamijou Touma and Marian Slingeneyer's battle in a daze. After all, the scale of the battle was simply too great. The clash between Kihara and Gremlin that had covered Baggage City had been incredible. And this was a battle between two people who had enough power to smash that other fight to pieces. Even though her limbs were functioning properly and she stood in the same location, Kumokawa Maria felt like she was reading it from a report. Even if she knew the details, she could not interfere. That was obvious. It was wrong to even think of struggling. The battle was so great and the scene so grand that the gears needed to act in the present to change the future seemed missing.

However, even when people read a set report or watch a set film, they still sometimes raise a cry. Even as they know it will not get through and it will not change anything, the words still come out.

Sitting on the floor, Kumokawa Maria forced out some such words.

"The teacher I was searching for may have disappeared long ago. He may not have been the person I thought he was."

Her words were those of an outsider.

Her words would change nothing.

"He may have worked with Gremlin under the name Bersi and taken on all sorts of dirty jobs. He may have hurt many people and desired to hurt many more."

But she did not stop. She did not stop

Kumokawa Maria's mouth moved even as she knew it was useless.

"But that was not all there was to Kihara Kagun."

Her muttering turned to a shout.

The strength increased for the very reason that nothing would come of it.

"He did not start out as Bersi. Gremlin is not the only thing in his past. Even if he was on the side of those that wanted to destroy the world and even if he did horrible things as Kihara Kagun, he was still the teacher that listened to everyone's worries at one point!!"

She no longer cared about her pride.

Even if shouting like that hurt her pride, it would not break.

Even if it was pointless, meaningless, and would change nothing.

She was not so distorted as to think that was shameful.

“Please. Please!” shouted Kumokawa Maria. “Do not remove the word teacher from his gravestone! Do not let that word be buried by some unknown enemy that only wishes for slaughter and destruction and who comforts herself with that sword!!”

And that time came.

Kamijou Touma’s form collapsed and Marian Slingeneyer made her preparations for her attack. And of course, the brown magician did not hesitate. She immediately took action to bisect the boy who stood in the way of her goal.

But Kumokawa Maria heard it.

Amid that mayhem on a grand scale that felt like a report of the past that she could not interfere in…

She heard the response from that boy that made her feel feebly connected to it all.

“Understood.”

Immediately after that one word response, Kamijou Touma and Marian Slingeneyer both moved at the same time.

Part 4

Kamijou Touma’s form collapsed.

He could not evade now. He could not punch Marian even though she was so close. While in that half standing state, he could not move his body weight and could therefore not make any powerful movements.

Kamijou Touma immediately moved his left hand rather than his right.

He reached out for one of the gold sparkles floating in the air.

It was one of the fragments of the human-altering tool Marian Slingeneyer had used. It had already been shattered by Imagine Breaker and lost all its effectiveness as a spiritual item. Kamijou grabbed it and used it to cut his own clothing. He grabbed the portion of his sleeve he had cut off.

He threw it.

The speed did not matter.

What mattered was accurate control.

He only tossed the scrap of cloth with the strength of someone jokingly tossing an eraser and it was not headed for Marian Slingeneyer.

It was headed for the scabbard of the magic sword.

More accurately, it was headed for the clear sphere that had expanded out from the bottom of it.

The Imagine Breaker countermeasure Marian had prepared was a purely physical phenomenon. That way the large swords created from gravity could sever Kamijou's right hand that only activated in the face of supernatural powers.

In other words, *the large swords were purely physical phenomena and therefore the magician Marian Slingeneyer herself could not completely control that ultimate weapon. After all, she could only control magic.*

By controlling the size of the balloon and the location of the opening, she controlled the size, force, and direction of the giant swords, but that was all she could control. She controlled the hole, so she could not completely distort the direction taken by the particles emitted from the hole by gravity.

In that case, what would happen if her control of that hole was interfered with?

It was not an issue of strength. If the hole was only lightly covered, the shape of the opening would change.

If Marian activated a gray sword in that state, it would change like putting a showerhead on a faucet.

In other words, the overwhelming sword that was produced would not be able to hold its form and would cause devastation against Marian's wishes.

"…Ah?"

In that instant when Marian Slingeneyer was sure of her victory, she looked toward the magic sword's scabbard in confusion.

That may have been her mistake. If she had time to do that, she may have been better off deactivating the clear sphere.

It ended up being more like holding your thumb over the opening of a hose.

The mass of particles like dust and dirt had lost their normal path out and were forced out through the multiple gaps around the edges.

An explosion.

That word expressed it best.

With an explosive noise, Marian Slingeneyer's short body was blown back a few meters before landing.

"Gahh!?"

Her back struck the concrete floor and she started to have trouble breathing. Even so, she did not let go of Dáinsleif's scabbard.

Meanwhile, Kamijou did not try to pursue her.

Just running up to her unarmed would lead to a repeat of the previous situation. To ensure his attack against Marian using his previous success, he had to do something else first.

"Once you know the trick, it's simple," said Kamijou Touma as he cut off a few more scraps of cloth from his own clothes with the gold fragment. "You fire and then swing. Your attacks always went through those two stages. Was it to hold back the recoil? That was why you stopped for an instant before opening it. You, that scabbard, and the sphere swelling out from it all stopped. That made it easy to aim. Even with my off-hand, I was able to get a direct hit with that weightless scrap of cloth. If I use my entire body and my right hand, my accuracy will increase. Also, does it suck in the dust and dirt it needs like a vacuum cleaner? If so, I just have to throw it at random and it will be sucked in toward the hole on its own. That is why the hole will always be plugged up. I have no way of knowing what shape the exploding sword will take, so there is a danger of getting taken out too, but that is your limit. If this were rock-paper-scissors, you would only be able to tie or lose. There is no way for you to win."

"That was…still…" Scraping the scabbard on the concrete floor, Marian slowly stood up. "That was still just the scabbard. I have yet to draw the magic sword. Dáinsleif is the magic sword that causes the war that destroys the world. It was created to destroy all of humanity, so it cannot lose to a single person."

She used her thumb to raise the guard.

A few centimeters of the ominous blade touched the air.

If she drew it all at once, it would likely truly activate.

Everything before had merely been the preparations. The fear that stopped one's heart and the scabbard that produced swords that had sliced the ring to pieces were nothing more than the rings of Saturn around the magic sword.

If she used it, who knew what would happen?

It might be something that far exceeded what Kamijou Touma could imagine.

Even so, the boy spoke directly to her.

“You won’t draw it.”

“What…?”

“If you could use such a great power at any time, you would have drawn that sword from the beginning. And I don’t just mean of this fight. You would have done so before sending Radiosonde Castle or revealing Gremlin to the world. *If you could use it, you would have been able to end all these battles before the fighting began and taken all the victory for yourself*. You could have done that if you had been able to sacrifice all but yourself.”

“…”

It was possible its destructive power was so great that Marian herself was not confident she could control it. Or perhaps it was pure fear. Just revealing a few centimeters from the scabbard was enough to stop the hearts of her enemies, so perhaps she herself would be bound by fear if she drew the entire magic sword.

But…

There was one more thing.

“You did not want to draw it.”

“What?”

“You did not want to draw that magic sword called Dáinsleif. You did not want to draw that spiritual item that is simply too destructive.”

“Why do you think that!?”

“I don’t know how much of the world it would destroy, but it would definitely destroy more than you want to be destroyed,” said Kamijou as he consciously regulated his breathing and clenched the scraps of cloth in his hand. “When that Bersi or Kihara Kagun or whoever he was died, some might have felt all was lost. But you are different. While you did bring out Dáinsleif, you still did not draw it. Even if your comrade-in-arms had been lost, you did not want to destroy the place where you t

wo had spent time together.”

A high-pitched noise drowned out Kamijou’s voice.

It was the sound of the bottom of the magic sword's scabbard scraping across the concrete floor.

Marian Slingeneyer's other hand touched the magic sword's hilt for the first time.

She clenched it.

"Charge."

Immediately after she said that, a giant light fell down from the heavens, breaking through the roof of the domed facility. The shockwave blew in all directions. The outer walls of the dome creaked. A great amount of power filled the magic sword's scabbard and the power that had been used up little by little was replenished.

She was preparing it for use.

She was preparing the power that would destroy the world.

"I *will* draw it."

"Then do it."

"At the very least, I will have this victory."

"*Even if you do this, it will not be a victory for you.*"

Kamijou Touma said no more.

He took a step forward. And another. With that momentum, he charged forward. He charged straight toward Marian Slingeneyer.

She should have had time.

Marian Slingeneyer should have been able to draw Dáinsleif.

And yet…

"Gh…kh…!!"

"See, you can't do it," spat out Kamijou Touma.

He tightly clenched his right fist.

"That is because you are strong. You do not feel indebted. If, after your revenge, you or the entire world are gone, who will mourn for Bersi?"

Nothing more was necessary.

The gold scabbard and the boy's fist crossed.

With a dull noise, it was all over.

Part 5

"It's over…?" muttered Kumokawa Maria as she sat on the floor.

The circular ring had been sliced to pieces and the roof of the domed facility had been torn apart as well. It had been supported by artificially raised air pressure, but the framework seemed to be just barely holding it up for the moment. Of course, they had no idea how long that would last.

Kumokawa suddenly felt a great cold.

The destroyed domed ceiling had let in the -20 degree weather, but it was also possible Kumokawa Maria's senses were finally returning to her.

That battle had made her doubt whether she was actually sensing anything properly.

The battle had been greatly distanced from the standard of Academy City and even those from outside Academy City could probably have noticed that it was different. Kamijou Touma, the one who had caused it, cut across the ring that had been casually sliced to pieces. He was headed for Dáinsleif which had fallen from Marian Slingeneyer's hand.

"Wh-what are you going to do?"

"I can destroy even this," Kamijou said without turning around. "Marian couldn't draw it, but someone else might be able to. They might be able to hold back the fear and control it. In that case, I cannot allow it to get out. Who knows how destructive it is."

As he answered, he unhesitatingly walked over to the magic sword that was the source of all that fear.

Kumokawa Maria felt that everything would finally be over once he destroyed it.

The chain of superhuman battles between Kihara and Gremlin in Baggage City would finally be over.

Kamijou crouched down in front of the magic sword and Kumokawa Maria asked him a question.

"How did you get here? How did you find out about what Gremlin was doing here? It seemed to be a different theory from what Academy City uses."

"It was Bersi."

His quick response sent pain into Kumokawa's chest..

Kamijou continued.

"I never actually met him face to face, but he left various hints around Baggage City that led me here. Also, I still find it suspicious that a mere high school student like me was able to get here from Hawaii with no help."

How much of it had that man planned?

It may be true Kamijou Touma's intrusion had saved Baggage City from the worst possible ending. At first glance it all looked like a part of that magician's plan and that he had left everything for Kamijou Touma to resolve in the very end.

However, what if Kamijou Touma had ended it all sooner?

What if he had broken the illusion sooner?

Things may have ended differently. Bersi's own objective may have been destroyed and all those tragedy might have been avoided.

Kamijou Touma had been manipulated by Leivinia Birdway and he wanted to rid himself of that.

However, had he done the right thing?

This time he had not been manipulated by anyone, but he did not know the answer to that question.

That was how perfect Bersi was.

If Kamijou Touma had succeeded, that was good. If he had failed, Bersi had his own conclusion prepared.

He cleaned up after himself.

Was it a pure ideal or was the conclusion too pure and should be resented?

"Do you know what kind of person the magician known as Bersi…or as Kihara Kagun was?"

"I do," replied Kumokawa Maria after she brought her own breathing under control.

As stated before, Kamijou Touma was an outsider this time. He may have simply wanted to know who the man was that had helped him and who had driven Marian on.

“I do not know much, but I do know. I may not even know whether he was good or evil in the end, but I do know him. He is the one that saved some lives including my own and – for me at least – he was a teacher whose mystery was worth pursuing.”

“I see…”

Kamijou stopped moving for a moment.

In a small voice, he spoke a truth that still had not changed.

He did not simply shout it.

His low voice seemed to carve it into him.

“I wasn’t able to save him.”

He learned a lesson in failure.

As if swearing to absorb as much of it as possible, he said it again.

“I wasn’t able to save him.”

“It’s fine,” replied Kumokawa Maria without hesitation. She seemed to be getting over something. “It was such a ridiculous death. He had this satisfied look on his face. I’m sure that was best for him. If it had stretched on any longer, it would have just lowered the purity of his happiness.”

Of course, it was not actually that simple.

Of course, it was not something with a clear explanation.

For a while, Kamijou did not move.

But remaining stopped would not change anything. If he did not move forward, the battle that began in Baggage City would never end. That was why Kamijou headed forward. He reached out his right hand. Toward Dáinsleif. He would bring it to a certain end by destroying that great power.

But…

A slender female hand grabbed Kamijou’s right wrist to stop him.

Kamijou had no idea when the person had appeared.

"Wha-…?"

He let out a questioning voice.

A girl of about 13 or 14 stood so close that he could feel her breath. The girl had white skin and wore a fur coat that was open on the front and an outfit of black leather. However, two other things she wore drew the eye even more.

The first was a wide brimmed hat with a pointed tip like a witch would wear.

The second was an imposing eyepatch covering her right eye.

Whoever she was, Kamijou concluded she was from the magic side and he went on full alert because she had grabbed his right wrist.

However, what happened next went well beyond anything he could have expected.

The eyepatch girl whispered to him.

"*…This isn't over yet*."

Immediately afterwards…

Without hesitation…

The girl tightened her grip, crushing Kamijou's right wrist and severing his hand.

PROFOUND DESTRUCTION.

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Utterly overwhelming pain tore Kamijou Touma’s consciousness from him the instant his right hand was crushed. His unconscious form dropped to the floor with surprising ease. It was much worse than having his hand cut off with a knife. An unbelievable amount of fresh blood spewed from the mangled wound, but the boy’s body no longer moved. He did not writhe in pain or fear or even let out a cry.

The no longer needed right hand was tossed to the floor.

“Ah…ah…”

Kumokawa Maria was unable to move.

The great amount of red blood made her feel dizzy.

But before that, the one-eyed witch who had suddenly appeared was simply too frightening. This was different from Dáinsleif. The feeling was different from that easily understandable surface fear. It slipped into the deepest portions of people without them noticing and the next thing they knew, strength had left their limbs.

It was like how domestic violence carried out behind locked doors was accepted as the normal routine even by the victim.

It was like the climax of a discussion about who to eat first while in a small snowed in cottage when there seemed no hope of rescue in the near future.

It may have been described as a great fear, but it was not something that could be rejected on the surface like it was a flame that you reflexively pulled your hand out of. This fear permeated you so deeply that it created a cycle that at a normal time you would immediately realize was strange. Just by standing there, the one-eyed witch could likely even destroy the morals in the hearts of all those around her.

For example, if an army was going to fight that one-eyed witch, it was possible the soldiers would get into a fight over who would be forced to stand before her and they would end up killing each other.

“Hmm.”

Meanwhile, the one-eyed girl grabbed Marian's Dáinsleif without even giving Kamijou another glance. The magic sword was still in its scabbard and she crushed it in her grip, scabbard and all. It broke apart. It was as if the weapon was made of chocolate. When Dáinsleif fell to the floor, it lost its golden glow. It then rusted over which was impossible for pure gold. Even Kumokawa Maria who did not know much about the powers outside of Academy City could tell the magic sword had completely lost its power.

"Honestly, why would she prepare something this dangerous? It may be a trait of the Dvergr, but why does she have to take the organization of Gremlin so lightly? …This ruins everything. I wish she would have thought about why I was holding back so much."

She destroyed it because it was dangerous.

That was the exact thought process as Kamijou Touma. In that case, she could have just left it to Kamijou, but instead she had carelessly destroyed him.

Why?

She probably had no reason.

She had spotted him first, so she had destroyed him first. When the other problem remained, she had destroyed it too. That was her thought process as she wielded that great power. No firm direction could be felt in it. Or perhaps, it was not needed to be felt.

It was the ultimate form of power wielded as an individual.

No thought was given to what effect it would have on the future.

"Wh-what…who…?"

"Othinus." The one-eyed witch named a god. "Unlike a certain failure, I am a pure Magic God. If that is not enough for you to understand, my words are wasted on you. You should just give up on understanding."

Was there even any intent behind those words? Or did she just say that in her spare time, on a whim, out of boredom, because she felt like it? That was the same way that she killed people, overlooked people, or saved people. It was so simple. It was simpler than a game of king of the castle. In fact, it was so simple that it actually made her true nature impossible to see.

Suddenly, something changed.

Something invisible blew out from the crushed remnants of Kamijou Touma's right wrist. With a roar, it shot toward Othinus without taking any real form.

However…

"…Is that all?"

Othinus's bloody hand grabbed something.

The one-eyed witch tilted her head to the side in confusion.

"It seems you produced decent results during the final stages of World War III, but is this all I find when I open the lid?"

She carelessly crushed it.

The invisible power writhed and seemed to try to flee from Othinus. But it was too late. She poured more strength into her bloody fingers and this time the invisible power was torn apart and disappeared into thin air.

The violence was overwhelming.

The violence was enough to hold back that unknown power while it was still unknown.

The one who produced that violence gave no thought to the effects it would have on her surroundings.

Othinus slowly held out her bloody hand.

She grabbed the back of Marian Slingeneyer's overalls as the girl lay collapsed and unmoving. Othinus then forcibly lifted her up.

"I'm going to the effort of collecting you, so make sure to be of some use," she muttered before turning her back on Kumokawa Maria.

But then she froze in place.

The Magic God had overlooked Kumokawa Maria on a whim, but now had she decided to kill her on a whim?

Kumokawa Maria thought that was so, but she was wrong.

"*…Oh, it's the failure.*"

Immediately after Othinus's voice rang out, another person was now there.

At some point, a blond young man had come to be in the ring.

There was nowhere he could have been hidden. There had been no sign of him using Academy City psychic powers. And yet that blond young man stood there. It was not that he had suddenly appeared. Kumokawa Maria could not put it that way. She had no idea *when* he had arrived.

And the strangest thing of all was that the blond young man was facing Othinus who had wielded such great power.

“Magic God,” he spat out rudely. It was as if he were declaring himself to be opposed to the one he named thusly. “I am not here for you this time.”

Most of the chain-link had been destroyed but the blond young man still pointed toward the mainly useless exit of the ring.

“Hurry up and leave with the Dvergr. I have business with that Imagine Breaker.”

“…”

Othinus remained silent for a bit.

But then…

A tremendous explosive noise burst out between Othinus and the blond young man.

Actually, it was not just one. Thousands and tens of thousands of explosive noises burst out at such short intervals that they all sounded like a single whole.

However, Kumokawa had no idea what had happened.

She saw no visual phenomenon.

She knew only one thing.

That blond young man could rival that Magic God named Othinus.

“Give it up. This will settle nothing,” said the young man.

Most likely, Othinus had only been testing him. After a few seconds, the explosive noises suddenly stopped.

“Do you think a mere failure can stand before a pure Magic God?” spat out Othinus.

“No, I don’t think I can win. If I could, I would have killed you long ago. I will abstain from killing you as long as I have no means of doing so. That’s all there is to it.”

“…So you’ve come to be killed by me?”

“It isn’t that either. *You know that.* You may be a Magic God, but you are not perfect. Or rather, you are too perfect and that gives you a troublesome characteristic. You know that and that is why you have put together this exaggerated plan to free you from that dilemma.”

“…”

"Infinite possibilities sounds good, but that gives you both the possibility of success and the possibility of failure. I suppose it's something like matter and antimatter. For everything, you must hold the possibility for success and the possibility for failure. No matter how much power you gather, you have a 50/50 chance. If you think of it like Russian roulette, it's like taking a shot with three bullets loaded. Let's be honest, Othinus. *While you possess the power to destroy the world, you also have a 50% chance of losing to a child in a game of rock-paper-scissors*. It's almost a miracle that Kamijou Touma has lost twice. His misfortune must really be something. But given this condition, you cannot just wield your full power at random. You want to find a way to control those possibilities. Wanting to increase your possibilities for victory is natural, but when your possibilities for failure increase too, you need to find some way of dealing with that. 50/50 is the most troublesome of all."

The young man then pointed toward his own chest with his thumb.

And he spoke.

"I am an impure example that stopped at the point where I 'should have' become a Magic God. In other words, I lose to you in overall power, but I am freed from that 50/50 dilemma. After all, I am imperfect. Unlike your perfect balance, my odds of victory have a deviation."

"And you think that will let you win?"

"No, I already told you I can't. If I could, I would have killed you long ago," said the young man before smiling and continuing. "But that doesn't mean I don't have an idea as to how to push you back just a bit. It's all thanks to how you so carelessly crushed Kamijou Touma's right hand."

"You don't mean…?"

"World War III was started by a man who held the power to save the world. He had the power to save the world, but could not save the world without a right hand to output that power into the world. That was why he used various methods to obtain that special right hand. That's right. *You cut off the right hand that only one of can exist in the world*."

A great metallic noise came from above.

It was from one of the pillars used to support the chain-link fence surrounding the ring. A man wearing red had appeared atop it at some point. His right arm had been severed at the shoulder. Growing from there was an unnatural distortion of space that looked as if sugar water had been mixed in.

"Fiamma of the Right with his power to save the world. And me, a man who can wield the power of a Magic God even if it is impure. …Now then. What will you do in response to these changing possibilities, 50% Othinus? I believe you have even odds of just forcing your way through this."

“Hmph,” snorted Othinus.

While holding Marian Slingeneyer in one hand, she turned her back on the young man. She was going along with her opponent’s suggestion.

But after taking a few steps, Othinus suddenly stopped. She carelessly tossed Marian to the side.

“No, I guess I’ll kill you,” she said.

With a great roar, something beyond Kumokawa Maria’s understanding blew about.

Natural Selector, the one who determines natural selection. On that stage where countless contestants, Kiharas, Gremlin, Kamijou Touma, and Marian Slingeneyer had all fought, a battle began that had the same theme but was on a completely different level.

◆

In a small hospital in northern Europe, lights out had passed so normally no visitors would still be there. However, someone other than the usual patient was in one of the private rooms.

She was Brunhild Eiktobel.

She was a rare woman that had both the inborn condition from Norse mythology of being a Valkyrie and the inborn condition from Christianity of being a Saint.

Those two powers worked against each other, so her nature and power switched out over a set period of time like the waning and waxing of the moon.

As stated before, she was not a patient.

The patient in the room was a boy of about 10 who was lying on the bed.

“I want some cocoa.”

“You can’t. You already brushed your teeth.”

“But I can’t sleep like this.”

“Then try counting sheep in English.”

If anyone else had been there to hear that conversation, it would have sounded peaceful enough, but Brunhild had once carried out a magical terrorist attack on a global scale to get revenge against the ones who had harmed the boy. In the end, she had been defeated by the Anglican Church and imprisoned, but her cooperation during World War III had gotten her charges dropped. At that point, she had finally been reunited with the boy.

She had sensed the end of the peaceful time.

She casually brought her left hand up against her right wrist and pulled a piece of wood the size of a stamp from a loop of string hidden in her sleeve. The surface had runes branded into it and Brunhild muttered something under her breath while gripping it in her hand.

It was the seal of sleeping.

In Norse mythology, it was said to have been used by Odin to seal a rampaging Valkyrie, and as the name suggested, the string of runes forcibly caused sleep.

The effects came quickly.

The boy lost consciousness and was quickly invited to the world of dreams. Brunhild left the piece of wood on his forehead.

“You do not need to see what comes next. I hope you at least have pleasant dreams,” she whispered and fixed his blanket.

She then stood up from the folding chair next to his bed.

She turned around.

At some point the door to the room had been opened. Someone stood beyond it. It was a tall woman. She was wearing a skintight riding suit and a jacket was tied around her waist by the sleeves. However, she had a Western sword on her back and a hair decoration with bird feathers above her ears. She was artificially given the same impression as Brunhild.

Brunhild Eiktobel frowned slightly.

“Come to think of it, there was a magical experiment to turn people into Valkyries after birth by distorting the important parts of the people similar to changing one’s blood type with a bone marrow transplant. I had heard the experiment was stopped, but I suppose a new generation was created at some point.”

“…”

The artificial Valkyrie sucked in air to give some kind of response.

However, no words came out.

Immediately afterwards, Brunhild’s kick struck the artificial Valkyrie in the middle of the gut.

It went well beyond blowing her away.

She was splattered against the wall. As if the artificial Valkyrie's body had been a water balloon filled with ketchup, something dark red splattered against the corridor wall outside the hospital room. When it was possible some harm might come to that boy, Brunhild did not hold back. In all seriousness, she would unhesitatingly make an enemy of the 6 or 7 billion people that made up the world.

And her decision had not been wrong.

The surface of the dark red stain on the wall moved. It formed a giant face. The richly colored viscous liquid vibrated to form a voice to match the moving mouth.

"Our information was correct."

She was not yet dead.

The artificial Valkyrie would likely reform into her previous shape and begin anew.

Not even Brunhild knew how such a horrible thing could be pulled off.

"The main problem is that boy. If we can capture him, we can freely draw out all of Brunhild Eiktobel's secrets."

"…"

Ignoring any kind of strategy, Brunhild merely reacted to that comment and silently walked out the door of the hospital room.

And then she realized something.

To the left and right in the corridor were over 10 people. The artificial Valkyries were waiting for her.

"Thanks for waiting," she muttered before kicking up a sword on the ground and catching it in one hand. She did not even need to draw the sword. She muttered something under her breath and the sharpness of blade sliced through the scabbard from the inside. It was the one handed sword the artificial Valkyrie she had defeated first had dropped. Brunhild normally preferred a heavy claymore sword that could smash the opponent, armor and all, but it was no time to be picky.

In fact, she had no guarantee that she would survive.

She might have been able to win in a pure fight to the death, but the artificial Valkyries knew Brunhild's weakness. If attacks came from over 10 different directions at once while she had to protect that boy, the difficulty grew considerably.

And Brunhild would unhesitatingly choose the boy if only one of them could survive.

That was why it was possible that she would lose to an opponent she should be able to defeat.

When Brunhild 'drew' her sword, the artificial Valkyries also drew their swords in unison.

That was when something slammed through the hospital corridor with the force of a dump truck.

A different group of artificial Valkyries that had been waiting outside had been blown away and sent rolling along the floor.

Someone had thrown them with incredible strength.

All focus was turned in the direction they had come from. At the end of the dark corridor (given the silence despite the great commotion, the doctors and other patients must have had some kind of magical spell cast on them), the faint light of the emergency exit sign provided enough illumination to see someone standing there. The strange woman wore a rough shirt and jeans as well as a work apron. Overall, this gave her the image of a maid. Also, Brunhild could detect a similar sense in the woman to herself. But not from the Norse side of things. It was a Christian sense.

"…A Saint? What number are you?" said Brunhild.

The blonde maid smiled and scratched at her head.

"I forget. I think it was above you, though."

"Why are you here?"

"I like simple things. Whatever I think of you as a whole, your desire to protect that which is important to you is not wrong. I hate those who target that desire for their own benefit. That is all."

The artificial Valkyries changed their formation. In order to quickly deal with two enemies they changed the direction of the edge of their swords.

However, the blonde maid only smiled and said, "And I'm not the only one that feels that way."

It was immediately after that.

It came from the opposite direction down the corridor. After a tremendous rumbling noise, more artificial Valkyries came flying from beyond the darkness. A short girl appeared, walking down the corridor. She held a wand in her hand and was the boss of a modern Western magic cabal.

She was Leivinia Birdway.

"I made a reasonable investment. I have to make sure I get some kind of returns. I'm glad I have some proper Norse members here. Unlike with Cendrillon or Saronia A. Irivika, it looks like I might actually get some valuable information out of this," the girl said while spinning around her wand. "I may not be one to talk, but I'm starting to get pissed at how unrestrained your actions are, Gremlin. So how about you keep me company? I can use you to relieve the stress you caused."

"…"

The artificial Valkyries stopped moving for an instant.

It looked as if they were hesitating over the change in the situation, but they were not.

Brunhild Eiktobel was the first to realize it.

"I see. So that's it."

She looked up at the ceiling and ignored the building materials to focus on the sky above.

She looked at the flying assassin up there.

"There are still a few left. And they have gotten into my head. They drew my attention with the fighting to lower my mental defenses to draw out information on Gungnir."

That was the spear used by Odin in Norse mythology. It was the symbol of the power that god possessed. Brunhild Eiktobel had once used that ultimate Norse spiritual item in her revenge for the sake of a certain boy.

"It doesn't really matter," said the blonde maid simply. "We can just take some hints about Gremlin in exchange. Afterwards, we can head to their headquarters and crush them to get back what they stole."

◆

The result was clear as day.

As the Magic God Othinus leisurely left Baggage City, her expression was nonchalant despite the -20 degree blizzard.

She spoke to the person walking next to her.

"Have you had a chance to cool your head?"

"…"

Marian Slingeneyer remained silent.

She was not actually the one walking. She was being carried over someone's shoulder like a bag of rice. She was too close to the person to see them as a whole, but she could still tell who it was. The person's scent and the feel of the person's skin were both nostalgic. But something was wrong. It was like the difference between someone who was sleeping and someone who was dead.

Marian finally managed to open her mouth.

"Bersi."

No response came. The man who had once been her comrade walked silently. Even in that blizzard, he did not shiver or even get goose bumps.

Marian Slingeneyer knew what had happened.

The Magic God spoke bluntly.

"The difference between living and dead is a subtle one."

"So we have new member of the Einherjar."

It was an almost identical technique to the human modifications Marian carried out. Except this one specialized in corpses. Gold was put into the important parts of the human body and the corpse could be controlled without it decomposing.

The Magic God sounded bored as she spoke.

"Please tell me you aren't going to complain like those in Baggage City. You know, something like *'How dare you do that when that teacher was determined to the point of dying to accomplish his goal'*."

"…I won't."

Marian did not have enough energy left to shout even if she wanted to.

Something definitive had been lost from the world.

"What happened to those that made that complaint? Did you make them part of that army of the dead too?"

"No. As usual, someone got in my way."

Someone got in her way.

For Othinus, the number of people who could do that was quite limited.

“Did the failure…Did Ollerus appear?”

“Currently, when I face him, it always ends in a tie. That’s just how things are set up. I will need to do something about him too at some point.”

Her one weakness.

A threat greater than Imagine Breaker.

However, Othinus’s expression did not change as she spoke. For her, it was likely similar to looking at a puzzle she already knew how to solve. She did not need to think about it. She only had more work that required physical exertion like cleaning a messy room.

Marian Slingeneyer asked a question while feeling an unnatural warmth from the corpse that did not decompose.

“What about the holism?”

“Since Imagine Breaker shattered something, something like what we wanted was there. However, there are a few barriers we must get through before we can accomplish that phenomenon with a single brain. To be honest, I do not think a mere human can do it.”

“If we need someone who is more than human, can’t you just do it?”

“A Magic God is a part of the world of magic. I do not want to mix in psychic powers as well.”

The holistic psychic powers were different from Academy City’s, so it was possible no side effects would occur. However, Othinus still seemed cautious. She was the Magic God that stood above all others, but she was cautious.

After a bit of silence, Marian said, “Then what is our next target?”

“We acquired the furnace in Hawaii, the information on the spear should be going well, and we will likely be able to collect the specimen we need for the holism. This specimen must hold properties that surpass those of a normal human. Also, this person must not be a Saint or Valkyrie that is supported by magic. Nor can the person have undergone Academy City’s psychic powers development. Not many natural specimens like that exist.”

“Do you know where a person like that is?”

"Academy City," said Othinus.

And then she added one more thing.

"In a windowless building. This specimen is sleeping quietly within one of the core structures supporting that large building."

◆

Kamijou Touma's consciousness flickered in and out.

He had lost consciousness due to the intense pain from having his arm crushed and severed without anesthetic and the shock from losing so much blood at once. That was what had happened. But something was odd. Even though his heart was still beating irregularly, the cause of it all was gone. Completely gone. He could tell when he weakly looked over to his right hand.

His right hand was…

Connected.

He tried to open his mouth and speak, but a dry scratchy noise was all that came out. He had definitely received that damage. In fact, it was still wreaking havoc within his body. And yet his arm was connected. For his arm alone, it was as if nothing had happened.

Someone spoke.

"Amazing. If it had been cut off with a sharp blade, that would be one thing. But it was completely crushed. Normally, not even the bone would have connected, much less the nerves."

Someone else spoke.

"It was the same when I did it. That is the proof that the current generation Imagine Breaker is still attached to him. There is meaning in that right hand belonging to him. To put it one way, the right hand is only the right hand when it is growing from his right shoulder."

"I wonder if they realized that."

"Who knows. They may just have wanted to hurry up the next generation. After all, Kamijou Touma's disposition is difficult for Gremlin to use. It would be faster if they transferred it to something else. Of course, that's only if their objective is Imagine Breaker."

"Theoretically, it may indeed be faster to use Imagine Breaker with her nature as a Magic God being too strong and getting in the way."

Still collapsed on the ground, Kamijou Touma stared up at the ceiling.

Someone peered down at him.

He tried to ask a question, but someone else cut in first.

“He found me like this, too.”

“Come to think of it, you too had lost your right arm. This one seems to have reconnected though.”

The first person then replied as if he had known what Kamijou was going to ask.

He said it in a casual voice.

“I’m Ollerus, the man who should have become a Magic God.”

The construction of a point of contact.

A clear connection.

That great uncertain element casually appeared even though it was unclear whether he should really be meeting Kamijou Touma, the owner of Imagine Breaker.

Ollerus continued speaking to Kamijou as he lay on the ground.

“It will probably take some time until that right hand *that fixed itself* is back to normal. But thanks to the nature of that right hand, Fiamma and I cannot do much. Anything that would help with the pain would simply be negated.”

“…Ah…”

Kamijou Touma moved his mouth and uttered another noise in a cracking voice.

Ollerus assumed he was asking for healing or pain relief despite knowing it was useless. Ollerus could not blame him since his right hand had been severed and healed over the course of 20 or so minutes.

But that was not what Kamijou wanted.

He finally managed a trembling voice.

“There…must still be…people waiting to be rescued in Baggage City. Even if the Kiharas and Gremlin have withdrawn, the scars they left remain. I need to…I need to save those people that I did not arrive soon enough to save…”

Hearing that, Ollerus gave a slight smile.

And he spoke.

“Then I will not refrain from overworking you. First up is the analysis and re-servicing of the people Marian Slingeneyer left behind. A portion of the soldiers she used as well as Cendrillon who was turned into a table can be turned back into their normal forms with your right hand and our intellect.”

◆

“I…survived…” muttered someone utterly insignificant.

Standing in the -20 degree blizzard was Shar Berylan. Of the soldiers protecting Baggage City, he had no idea how many had survived (the network between soldiers was down, so he knew something wasn’t right), but it seemed he had been chosen to be one of them.

He himself did not know why that was.

Had he benefited from not approaching the center of the storm? Was he simply more skilled than he thought he was? Or had he merely been lucky?

“End combat. I repeat, end combat! The higher ups will decide everything from here on out. Assume any further aggressive actions will put us in an even more unfavorable situation!”

He had been hearing plausible things over the sub radio frequencies outside the network, but there was meaning in hearing it as an official order from the higher ups. Things were truly over. Assuming of course that all those who had fought seriously were not buried below the snow and there were actually more people to hear the transmission.

Shar wondered what he would do now that he had survived.

He had been hired by Baggage City and the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians, but they had clearly been destroyed. Even if the higher ups reformed, Shar swore silently that he would not respond to their summons. Academy City was a monster. He had thought the rumors were exaggerated, but the reality was 5 or even 10 times worse.

A bit away from Shar’s position, something had fallen into the snow. Even in the blizzard, it had not been completely covered by the snow, so it stuck out unnaturally.

“Is that the remains of an Academy City bomber?”

Naturally, that would make it a collection of technology. Shar had no idea how to handle something like that, but there would be people who would want it. And he could use some money for retirement. He was lucky. The luck that had gotten him through that battle was still with him.

Thinking that, Shar reached out for the black fragment that was just big enough to hold in both arms.

But then…

“Hurry, hurry. If the markers wear out, we’ll have to dig up all this thick snow. Recover it all before then.”

“!?”

Shar frantically hid behind a scrapped vehicle. A number of powered suits had appeared with sluggish motions. …Was that even the right term for them? Whatever they were, they looked like twisted dragonfly or scorpion costumes and they walked through the blizzard like a joke.

He wondered why they spoke directly to each other rather than using a radio.

Perhaps they were simply so un-humanlike that they would lose a sense of who they were without that humanlike behavior.

“This goes for everything from the Academy City side and the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians side. Whether it is still usable or it is destroyed, gather everything. The Data Pheromone capillaries in the damaged items are made to burst. Follow the smell and recover them before the marker disappears.”

“What do we do if anyone interferes?”

“Eliminate them. It does not matter if they know what they have or not. Even if they think they have a piece of a UFO or believe it to be an OOPArt, blow them to smithereens. The markers are weak to high heat, so the flames may have weakened the scent. Be careful.”

“…”

Shar Berylan pulled back his outstretched arm and quickly moved away from the scraps.

The speed with which he made such changes may have been why he had survived.

◆

A while after the turmoil in Baggage City had ended, a certain person arrived. She was a young woman that wore a ready-made cheap suit. She looked as if she were heading in for a job interview. However, the documents in the large envelope she held all held top secret information that not even *the leader of an entire nation* was allowed to view.

She was in control of something on the global level.

The old man who had merely trembled deep within Baggage City was no match for her.

The true tops of Baggage City and the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians had been completely crushed by the Kiharas. This old man was only the one who set the policies of the giant organization. When a young woman that took on the world was visiting him, that old men's defeat was already certain.

It was so certain that the right to decide had fallen to him.

Everyone above him had been utterly destroyed.

"Now then," said the woman. "I hope you now understand just how dangerous the things we hold in Academy City are. For that purpose, we lost three…no, four Kiharas. But I suppose that is a fair cost for such a demonstration. *The #2, Kakine Teitoku, also acquired a technique to form human cells using Dark Matter*, the loss has already been compensated for."

The number of victims had not even been 1/1000 of the number the woman had expected.

Most likely, it was due to the actions of the irregular Kihara that the spectators outside of the battle had remained unharmed.

The woman could not display it in simple numbers, so she was a little unsure if the fear had gotten across adequately. However, the old man was surprised by something else.

"A fair…cost…?"

"Yes. A fair cost for getting across without words that these Anti-Academy City grumblings are not only worthless but actually have a negative effect."

As she smoothly spoke, the woman pointed at the documents she had spread out on the luxurious table.

She tapped at what she pointing at.

"Don't tell me you thought those were the only Kiharas."

"If there are more, I am afraid but it has the opposite effect," the old man said after just barely working up an almost nonexistent bit of courage. "If Academy City has more of those things, it is worse than we thought. This is a danger to the world! We must stand up to them for the sake of good. Especially now that you have shown us what they are!!"

"What a pain…"

The woman in the suit brought her hand to her forehead in annoyance.

She then shook her head.

"You have it backwards."

“What…?”

“What do you think the Kiharas are? Please don’t give me some hackneyed response about them being an elite force created by Academy City.”

She pushed a few of the documents aside with her index finger to reveal another document buried beneath them.

She summarized what it said.

“It is a type of side effect. When people wish to misuse a field of pure science, someone appears to actually do it. That is what a Kihara is. Currently, most of the world’s cutting edge technology is held by Academy City. That is why the Kiharas are concentrated in Academy City. By concentrating them, they can be controlled.”

“You…don’t mean…”

“But if that concentration in Academy City is destroyed and science is scattered throughout the world, Kiharas will naturally start cropping up all over the world. They are currently bound to a single bloodline, but that is not a necessity. If you Anti-Academy City Science Guardians expand, the world will be overrun by Kiharas along with the technology. Academy City will be unable to control that.”

There was one simple example.

The heretical Kihara that had appeared in Baggage City. Kihara Kagun, the member of Gremlin who had gone by the name Bersi.

It may have been because he joined with Gremlin that they had an environment that allowed them to use scientific technology.

But it may not have just been that.

Kihara Kagun may have been destined to join Gremlin for the very reason that Gremlin planned to reinforce their magic with scientific technology.

“Now then, old man. The Anti-Academy City Science Guardians were created in the name of not allowing Academy City to continue with its tyranny, but are you prepared to stick with that ideal of yours even if it creates a world that will be swallowed up by tons of naturally occurring Kiharas?”

The woman held out a single piece of paper.

It was a contract with simple contents.

Just by signing the bottom of the paper, the fight would be over for the old man and the others on his side.

In the form of defeat, of course.

Really, it was nothing more than a ritual to let the old man and the others know about the already decided outcome.

“You…” squeezed out the old man as he held the fountain pen in a trembling hand. “You speak of these Kiharas so easily. Who are you?”

In response, the woman gave a slight smile. She grabbed the white coat she had folded and placed over the back of her chair. She spread it out and put it on. It was no ordinary coat. It was a lab coat.

“I am a Kihara, too. Kihara Yuiitsu. I am one of those who will always appear as long as humans use science.”

That woman who had written off the loss of four Kiharas as a small sacrifice left Baggage City with a single piece of paper in hand.

She did it so easily.

It felt like nothing more than someone building a fence on the weekend after their dog had escaped from the yard.

With that, the mayhem came to an end.

AFTERWORD

To those who have bought the volumes one at a time, it's been a while. To those who bought them all at once: nice to meet you.

I'm Kamachi Kazuma.

It's the fourth book already!! This volume didn't use the old chapter concept of the past. This was to create an effect where the reader won't be able to predict what will happen next or know who would die, and created a rule to reveal everything near the end. This little gimmick that requires one to think drove the entire story this time.

This time, the main theme was about the relations between micro and macro. But as the story isn't divided into individual chapters this time, it may be difficult to comment on different episodes. Thus, this time, I'll break the rules and describe the characters that appeared. I will then use the understanding of these characters who drove the story to conclude this story again.

Kihara Ransuu.

A researcher working on the development of chemicals that affect the brain. I created this character by looking from the angle of what kind of skill was needed to create the #5 Five Over.

The skill itself was rather complicated, but he was the most mentally sane amongst the Kiharas that appeared here, and was someone who would easily understand people. He was in the middle-low tier of his family, and worked by looking at the people who were watching a sports ceremony and considering about those things. It would be very lucky of him if he could get any information as a Kihara.

There were lots of extreme real illusions in this story, but he was originally skilled at controlling emotions of a certain kind. For example, he could use a command like 'I don't know why, but the door handle just feels strangely scary → I don't want to go out' to limit his target's movement before killing them off with a gun or a knife. This was his fighting style.

He himself said that he felt that real illusions were made to kill time as it’s too boring to suppress the enemy early.

…In the end, he met someone with a similar ability, and was finally bound in that loop of illusions like he was facing a mirror.

Kihara Enshuu.

She looked like…damaged goods from the Kihara family, but in fact, she was a girl who used her intelligence to rise to the top of the group. Graphs did appear around Enshuu on the monitors, and that’s the function of the smartphone hanging on her neck which could add on to the information semi-automatically.

My initial concept was to make a Kihara robot. But as I thought about it, there was no robot that could talk in the exact same manner as a human, so I made some changes to her design (though it’s like observing a world where microbes on Mars are talking to each other in Japanese…). If I couldn’t let her think like a human, I might as well set her up as a human. On first glance, it looked like humans were using some program to create this ability. But if it’s not a girl, the person using it would become like a person that was controlled by the program… In fact, there are cases where people end up in such a situation due to over-reliance on things like weight control appliances and fortune-telling sites. In the end, is it still considered a curse?

On a side note, my final impression on Kihara Enshuu is that of an extremely ordinary girl who’s able to transform glamorously with the power of the Kihara!

Kihara Byouri.

She has often been called an aunty, but she’s a big sister wearing pajamas… What age will the so-called ‘aunt’ in light novels nowadays be? This is a character who liked to play sick, full of mysteries, and also a boss character born from the Japanese tradition of transformation. I like a powerful foe that’s tough to beat and something I can use to rest my back on, so her trait was the phase adjustment to deliberately show that she couldn’t stand up. It’s this reason that Kihara Kagun would keep his guard when around her. This time, she used the power of the #2. But even without using his power, she could just use the knowledge and skills of a Kihara and modify her own body rampantly.

In the end, Kihara Byouri was basically formed from the change of phase with the anticipation of the attack from the science side. So if she was attacked by something out of science, that battle strategy which required transforming a few times and slowly becoming stronger wouldn’t work.

Kihara Kagun.

The ace this time. He wasn't just limited to working on near-death experiences originally, but also about everything related to life and the soul that wasn't supernatural. He explained them through scientific means and tried to conclude that a human's life really existed, and that it wouldn't change in value because of standings or sudden changes in situation (basically, this Kihara's aim was good…just the aim). However, during his experiments, he created the skill to easily turn a human life On-Off, and realized that if he continued with his experiments, even if the value of human life never changed, it would be held at a very low baseline, and thus will be researched.

As a researcher, he undoubtedly killed the most number of people amongst the Kiharas. But the total damage he had done was 0 for he revived the dead, which made him someone with such amazing experience.

He looked…thoroughly like a kind teacher who ran off to seek revenge. But after thinking through it, this guy may have gotten the power to take revenge, but he did agree with the Radiosonde Castle and the Hawaiian Islands incidents. He helped the audience at Baggage City, but he also did take part in the action in Baggage City. He can be considered to be like the other Kiharas when it comes to achieving a good objective and destroying everything to achieve the means… In other words, this Kihara was released because he protected the children from the killer on the road, but finally couldn't control his own actions.

…Thus, because such a thing happened, Kumokawa Maria concluded that the 'sorry' wasn't said to her, but to others. In fact, Kumokawa Maria was one of the others. That's because the teacher she spent so much time to find no longer existed.

Bersi.

We'll be giving a cross-analysis to distinguish him from Kihara Kagun. As he had a defensive spell that completely nullifies fatal wounds, he was a problematic character who didn't mind about other people's personalities or habits and would interfere through small actions. Logically, if someone with ordinary emotions ended up in such a situation, the mind would collapse first. However, I avoided the above-mentioned problem by stating that his research became useful in such an attack.

He could nullify all fatal attacks, but he also had a sword spell that increases its destructive power every time he was attacked. Thus, when facing a fierce attack by the enemy, he could use a spell that has an infinite ceiling. This is different from Accelerator in that it's not the control of just one attack, but that the thing that's worth noting is that once the power increases, he could maintain such destructive power when fighting the enemy in the future. As his name suggested, he really was an inflating bastard.

However, he wouldn't be able to fight skillfully if his attack power wasn't fine-tuned. Thus, he's not used to attacking others. It's because of this that he used his fists to fight in the beginning. This could be somewhat seen from the way Kihara Kagun wished to fight with his target on equal grounds until death.

On a side note, Kihara Ransuu and Útgarða-Loki, who were dealt with easily at the beginning, would be the natural enemies to Bersi.

Útgarða-Loki.

The illusionist on the magic side. Like Sigyn and Marian, he was originally a magician who wasn't supposed to take part in direct battle. As for why such people were gathered in Baggage City, I suppose everyone understood from the explanation of a certain plan in the ending of the book? In other words, Gremlin didn't want to win. What's important was to accurately adjust the environment in Baggage City that got involved in the battle.

To Gremlin, they had no need to take action in Baggage City, but the Anti-Academy City Science Guardians said that they wanted to replace Academy City and create a global standard for supernatural powers, and brought their weird interests into this discussion and made use of them.

Sigyn.

The person who fell at the start of the battle. She originally could not only give suggestions to her allies, but also give wrong suggestions to the enemy and cause them to self-destruct. Thus, there are lots of ways for her to attack.

She's more apt at analyzing the opponent's logic than magic, and would add on to it. She would look like an expert in debating. Her skill in making up for logic could also be used for magic, and so she entered their profession (?).

She would just suggest, and the glory would only belong to her when it succeeds. It's because she continued to remain so irresponsible that she wouldn't have any hesitation to betray her allies when she had such a weak understanding of them even if she didn't end up like what happened in the volume. This was a character that would be interesting if she wasn't modified into a chair or table by Marian, whom we're about to talk about.

Marian Slingeneyer.

The culprit who brought the level of bloodiness in this story to this level. A fanatic at modifying human bodies… But one can tell from the drama when she pulled out Dáinsleif that she originally didn't specialize in modifying human parts.

It's mentioned in the work, but deliberately modifying the enemy's human parts into terrifying shapes was a strategic choice in battle to shake the enemy's will to fight.

Thus, she could modify everything that's not human too. She could modify them into handsome men and pretty ladies. The complete tools could be used to refine minerals, and she would need precise calculations, like what's used by guided missiles, to modify lifeforms. Anyway, it's roughly those kinds of rules, I suppose?

…It's just, since this is a girl who uses those kinds of tables and chairs to attain healing, I suppose it would be really amazing if she could make a beautiful lady according to her senses.

Through the explanation of Dáinsleif in the text, lots of people will be thinking that 'if that's the ability of the item that came with it, what's the actual ability of the item itself?' But like what Stiyl said in his Side Story, if they could randomly create a powerful spiritual item, it'll be impossible to achieve balance if they don't control it. Try to use these words to understand. On a side note, the Dáinsleif mentioned here is different from the Gungnir mentioned somewhere else. In the original legend, it was prepared for a human king to use. Thus, there's no need to view it as a connecting spell for gods to use gods' weapons and link it to the holy tool Mjölnir.

Able to modify people that freely yet succumb into panic when her partner Bersi died…that's her trait. She had an extreme personality of having a clear line between friend and foe and was somewhat insane at times. Even so, what if the final road really becomes her redemption…?

Saflee Opendays.

The most normal person amongst the competitors in the Natural Selector fighting tournament. A person who simply used wrestling moves. The current 1-versus-1 gimmick of the global martial arts tournament lost its luster with the psychic interference from Academy City (one can understand when powers were partly used for performance activities like Daihaseisai). She merely came to Baggage City to find someone who would support her using only wrestling moves.

Thus, her aim wasn't to win the Natural Selector, but to make those rich enterprises and investors focus on her instead of those with large amounts of power no matter what. Thus, her battle style went from an official tournament to street-side fighting, and nothing changed after the war between science and magic.

From the way she's worried about destroying, perhaps she had a relentless show business in her profession?

Oumi Shuri.

Looks like a 10-year-old, but this is only because of things like the Clostridium botulinum bacteria. She's actually a 30+ aunty. A ninja with a cheerleader outfit, a school bag, and a gardening trowel as her main weapon, and her nature's a mess. This was a measure to deliberately stand out and attract the enemy's attention... But it really brought a lot of trouble to the illustrator. It's messy, but if it's too messy, it would be really embarrassing. However, if it was too neat, it would deviate from the intent of the text. I feel that designing her image was a difficult C+ different.

Normally, characters of this kind would be of a low level (expendable). Genins should be in charge of protecting the Jounin of the higher levels (that's why the management could survive and built on such accomplishments to achieve their standings). However, Oumi Shuri herself overturned such a theory. She didn't get abandoned, but also made an amazing feat of surviving.

Naturally put, she still focused on protecting her allies and subordinates, but as the forces that first appeared were eliminated, she was running around berserk and far from her original thought process... The Kouga themselves secretly had people in Academy City, but they had a vastly different target from the ones here. From this, we can tell that the Kouga were largely divided.

Kumokawa Maria.

Fresh blood, illusions, human modifications, a ninja that tried to act young, a biological weapon, a shape shifting boss, the absolute cold of -20 degrees Celsius... In such a rampant hell, she was the ever important oasis. The panties-servicing younger Kumokawa sister. She's armed with a fighting style of Capoeira, breakdance, and pole dance. But even though she gave such an impression, there wasn't much mention in the text. Most likely, it's because she was worried that she would be exposed. The few illustrations of her caused a change in the hell in this volume!...But this girl looked like she was suffering, which was the jumping feeling or the moving weight or whatsoever.

Her ability's called Violence Doughnut, an ability to increase the centrifugal force in her by 0.5 to 2 times, and she's a Level 2. Centrifugal force, one of the basics when fighting, increases destructiveness, but her bones and muscles are as only tough as a human's, so her trait was that her bones will snap if she punched really hard.

She was often saying some amazing things, but Kumokawa Maria wasn't really active. However, that's likely a characteristic she shares with her older sister Seria. From the point mentioned in New Testament 2, that she couldn't do anything to prevent the 20,000 clones from dying even after knowing about it, one can understand the standpoint of these two sisters.

Kamijou Touma.

As everyone knows, he's safe as he's the protagonist. However, one of the main themes this time was to break the rule that with Kamijou around, all his allies will be saved. Thus, the key term, Kamijou Touma, was used for all sorts of things. Even in this story, there were lots of emphasis on the term itself.

However, I suppose the boy's existence that appeared at the end had an obvious difference to the Kamijou Touma from before. Because of this, even after returning to an ordinary chapter, the rule of the icy world that controlled this place was replaced by something else, so this difference wouldn't change. Anyway, it's that sort of reason why such a change happened.

…Well, I'm looking forward to seeing if there's going to be some amazing damage.

As for the character who appeared as a Boss-level opponent and caused the damage, I'll deliberately abstain from commenting. That's a twist which is for the benefit of the development of the series and for those important characters to continue to appear.

I'd like to express my thanks to my illustrator, Haimura-san, and my editor Miki-san. After I came up with the gimmick, Haimura-san probably spent a lot of thinking time to choose which illustrations to use for which scenes. The designation of the RPG-style shape shifting boss-type which would have meaninglessly increased the illustrating difficulty would have him yelling "NO!". I'll have to really thank him this time.

Also, I'd like to express my thanks to the readers. As I selfishly used my thoughts to break out of the safety zone and nearly caused the pillar of support sustaining the story to collapse, I faced this problem which a series would have when it runs on for too long but isn't going to be resolved easily. I'll give my heartfelt thanks to everyone for giving me the courage to tackle this problem.

And so, this volume ends with this page.

It is time to close the pages for now while praying that the pages of the next book will be opened.

And I lay my pen down for now.

A Valkyrie appeared, but I'll explain it in this volume, so please relax.

-Kamachi Kazuma